

**AN EVANGELISM MODEL: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AGES
TWENTY-ONE TO FORTY AT MOUNT ZION AFRICAN
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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ABSTRACT

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This project will explore reasons why African American males ages twenty-one through forty are largely absent from church life at Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. The hypothesis is if specific evangelistic strategies designed for this group based on a social construct of addressing their realities, then these persons will be open to the gospel and accept Christ as Lord and become active disciples in the life of the church. A control group of men, both active and inactive, is the focus group. A mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative research will be used through questionnaires to gather their responses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the One and only True Living Creator who has been the source of my supply. To my faculty mentor, Dr. Ralph E. Williamson, who has been a constant throughout this process, who believed in me and assured me to stay the course when I felt like throwing in the towel. To my Professional Associate, Dr. Michael J. Johnson, who has been an integral part of my journey and encouraged me to keep digging for more. To my Peer Associate, Dr. James A. Morris, for always keeping me grounded and helping me to see the bigger picture and allowing my creativity to shine through in my writing. To my Administrative Assistant, Katrinia Stakley, for you being who you are, and most importantly, a true friend for over twenty years. To my immediate family, especially my children who allowed me space, LaTaria and Ben; my backbone and number one supporter, my mother, Dr. Marian Torrence, who has at some point played every role in this project. Lastly, to my wife, Heleana, you are the wind beneath my wings: thank you for understanding how passionate I am about ministry and being that partner I needed to complete me.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Late Rev. Leon Singleton who would not let it rest until I enrolled in a doctoral program. He passed as I completed my first week of the program. To my “apples of my eye” who are with me in spirit: the Late Hattie Forbes and Annie “Granny” Banks, who I knew loved me unconditionally. To my grandparents, Coach Cornell and Mavis B. Torrence, who prayed mightily for me. To the churches and ministries this work will encourage and help to bring the men back to church.

ABBREVIATIONS

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
AMEC	African Methodist Episcopal Church
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
UTS	United Theological Seminary

Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor – all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked – who is good? Not that men are ignorant – what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men.

—W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

INTRODUCTION

In serving as a pastor for eleven years, I have developed a deep concern for African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. This concern is rooted in the fact that most men within that age group do not have an interest in attending or participating in church or its activities. Therefore, this study is designed to develop and implement teachings on discipleship that relate specifically to the needs of this group of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. The principal aim is to discover possible reasons why a significant number of African American males left the Mt Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Crestview, Florida. The research is designed to identify some of the problems that the church faces in recruiting and retaining young black males and present a number of solutions. Without the presence of African American males in churches to continue the legacy of their fore parents, the church will have limited growth.

Though targeting an AME church in Crestview, Florida, this concern is not only an AME church problem but also one that consists throughout all denominations. Throughout the United States of America, many churches find that there is a shortage of black males in their congregations. This is not something that happened overnight but has been afflicting churches for decades. Failure to address the issues and problems earlier and denying the fact that there were problems has led to a massive exodus of African American males in churches. Unfortunately, the leadership of our churches has stuck

their heads in the sand and pretended that all was well or that this was just a phase that the church was going through, which aided in the progression of the exodus. There has been a mass exodus of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty in mainstream church and the number one reason why people stop coming to any given church was reported by “over 91% people citing the significant factor or main reason being conflict and gossip.”¹ While this may be true in a large measure, there is also a sense that people in this age group find that the church is not relevant to them and note a tremendous amount of hypocrisy in the church.

It is my belief that presenting the gospel to this age group along with intentionally trying to meet their needs and meet them where they are will assist in slowly turning this decline around. Therefore, it is my intent to develop a model of ministry that will assist the Mt Zion AME Church and other churches as well in reclaiming the men of this group along with evangelizing and disciplining them. This will be done through a project called “A Model to Retain African American Males Ages Twenty-One through Forty at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church.” This model, executed with faith, will help these men find hope in Christ and meaning in their lives. In return, they will be the principle disciples evangelizing this age group in that they can better relate to them.

Chapter One will highlight part of my life story with emphasis on my spiritual journey, called to faith and call to ministry. It will also give a description on my context at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal. This unit will wed my passion and gifts for ministry that will serve as the basis of my synergy.

¹ Richard J. Krejcir, “Why Churches Fail: Part I - Church Leadership,” Institute of Church Leadership Development, last modified 2007, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42339&columnid=4545>.

Chapter Two will focus on the biblical foundations which is the platform from which this thesis and project are developed. The Old Testament text is Isaiah 55:1-5 and the New Testament text is John 1:43-51. The Old Testament text speaks to the prophet Isaiah and his announcement to the people of the exile that God was extending God's gracious invitation, evangelistic in fervor, to come and eat and be refreshed. The New Testament text illustrates an evangelistic appeal of one of the first disciples who sees Jesus and in turn introduces friend to the son of God.

Chapter Three highlights some of the areas in history that points to African American young males being isolated, ostracized and drifted away from the church. There are historical epochs and markers where these males felt emasculated in society and began to see little relevance in the church.

Chapter Four is the unit that examines some of the theological foundational thoughts behind men in general in how they are viewed from the lenses of theology. Here there are some aspects of practical theology in particular and how men relate to God and the church.

Chapter Five addresses the theoretical foundation of this thesis. It looks at some of the subsets of social science, mainly psychology, sociology, education, economics and the criminal justice system.

Chapter Six illustrates the methodology and design instruments used in this project. This unit also explains how the project was conceived and implemented. It concludes with a summary of learning and conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Early Years

My parents were both educated. My father was an only child spoiled rotten. My father has a Business Degree from Alabama State University and has not produced much with it. My mother at the time of my birth was completing her Master's degree in Education. They were both twenty-four when I was born, and they soon parted their ways. My father was an abusive alcoholic who never did much for me other than what his mother had him to do or court-ordered child support. The household was divided. My grandfather is a staunch Methodist and the rest of the family were Baptist. I was very intrigued in the devotional services that the deacons used to conduct in my formative years in the Missionary Baptist Church that kept me going back for more.

I definitely learned and saw how not to treat a lady by the men that my mother chose to marry and put in my life. Patricia Cranton, in her book, describes my thoughts best by saying we are unconscious and unaware of the effect of what we psychologically go through and experience.¹ Many nights as a lad I tossed and turned and had sleep interrupted with the police being called to the home or my mom screaming and going to work the next day with a black eye or choke marks from being abused. There were

¹ Patricia Cranton, *Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Son, Inc., 1996), 141.

several periods where I felt my mother wallowed in her self-pity and enjoyed being hurt by individuals who was envious of her relationship with her two sons.

Adolescence Years

In my eighth grade year I won a monetary award for minorities from an engineering firm. I began to get more active in my church activities. When I was not with my basketball coach or travelling to see my brother play ball, I was up and down the Panhandle with my first lady of the church attending layman meeting and missionary meetings on Saturday mornings. I began to take on leadership roles within the church, and the men of the church were very active in my development. I always had a fondness to the geriatrics and the seasoned saints and one of my heartaches had been and still now today is once I get too close to certain individuals and I befriend them, the Lord calls them home and it leaves a major void for me that is not easily filled or closed.

Basketball was my life for my three years of high school. Adjusting to new friends and environment was not as hard as balancing responsibilities of growing up and maturing and finding the beginning stages of prioritizing myself to meet the demands of who I was evolving into. I put myself in the mix of several organizations at school and honors classes to be the best student I could be. I announced at my basketball banquet to the surprise of my girlfriend, coaches, and teammates that I was forgoing my senior year of high school to enter college a year early. So, as I officially declared my choice, I immediately began to receive the benefits of being a senior. It was not to play basketball at the collegiate level but the reality of I had enough credits to graduate a year early and get away from childish high school behaviors. I had two proms to attend and graduations.

Early Adulthood

I decided to stay in Pensacola to attend the University of West Florida. Even though I was only seven miles from home, I lived on campus all four years of undergraduate school, and I made friends rather quickly and established myself on campus. I began as a business major and that was short lived because accounting courses did not agree with me. I knew that the Social Sciences was a field that was wide open and jobs would be good in Criminal Justice for years to come. One of my first projects was to debate the privatization of jails and prisons. That particular concept and subject is at the forefront in many states today who favor privatization over state run facilities for the incarcerated. I had a decent freshman year. I had the opportunity to serve the school as the only African American University Mentor. The University Mentors served as the official orientation leaders for incoming students.

The turning point in my first year of college was my paternal grandmother transitioned from this life. My grades began to fall for the next two years of college. I would always win my appeal because I knew how to write letters using various excuses as to why I was falling under the required grade point average to receive student aid. I was conference president of over five hundred young people in the panhandle of Florida leading them and their interest to the rest of the state.

My Calling

I had a gradual call to ministry to where I had no peace within myself. I was looking for a “Damascus Road Experience” but had to realize that was Paul’s story. My first feelings about ministry was when I would speak at churches as a layperson, and I

just felt a certain way as I would study and research for speaking at church on Sunday mornings, on programs, even talking about the Sunday School lessons. I always wanted to know more and more about the different topics, so I would research for myself at a very young age. I loved to ask “why or why not?” and my Sunday school superintendent, who was also one of my first mentors, would take me and we would research and read aloud the scriptures.

When I was a teenager and in undergraduate school, I ran from the “call” for a while using the excuses of being too young and immature. I was just not ready to become fully committed to accepting my calling from God. I wanted to “hang out” and do as my peers, but every time I would do something worldly, God would let me know that was not the life or road I had planned for you.

So when I was twenty years old, the first Sunday in July 2000, I walked down the aisle and gave the preacher my hand and said to him, I will serve the Lord and accept what God has shown me over and over again. I struggled for eleven months to live right and get the fullness of the new life that God had shown me through studying the Word, fasting and much prayer.

I was in the Louisiana area working and was under watch care with a young pastor in New Orleans who urged me to go to seminary to work out my calling and gifts. While in Louisiana, I was afforded the opportunity to see a medium-size church grow and watched how pastors in that area nurtured and cared for me through my call experience and allowed me to see church administration and my denominational polity and history upfront and personal. I participated in different worship styles and genres that has helped and propelled me into becoming a pastor.

I was able to return to my home church in Pensacola, Florida, and do my initial sermon on the first Sunday afternoon in June 2001, and the joy of the Lord was my strength. My scripture was Isaiah 6: 1-6 and the text was “Tune In.” That was a hallelujah Holy Spirit time in the blessed name of Jesus on that Sunday afternoon.

The Lord would not let me get comfortable in the eleven months during my initial acceptance and my initial sermon. During this eleven-month journey I did a lot. I had a plethora of jobs from working off shore, managing a shoe store, working for a security alarm company, managing several stores in a fast-food franchise, lab technician for an oil field service company, and working for several churches and ministries. I was accepted into graduate school to pursue my seminary degree.

First Sermon

I remember the first Sunday in July 2000. I preached that afternoon from the lectern on the floor from the scripture Isaiah 6:1-8 and I tagged it “Tune In.” I had a great cloud of witnesses who came to witness my initial sermon. Some came to spectate; others came as true supporters, so I gave my best. My relationship with my pastor was rocky, but I was on my way to seminary to study to show thyself approved.

My first year of Seminary was not the best academically; but overall, I survived and was made stronger by the events that I encountered. The more I tried to do my own thing, the more I knew my life was not my own and that to God I belonged. I found out that when you are over your head in thoughts and mess, somehow and someway the Lord has to hear your prayers and reposition you to be the best you can be. I visited several churches in Atlanta during my seminary years, but I affiliated with Allen Temple Church

because the pastor was a straight forward master teacher with all the tools that I would see in a small and large church dynamic there. This pastor was looking for sons and daughters in ministry to take up under his wings to mentor. I was afforded many opportunities to experience and do practical ministry.

To aid me in Seminary I worked meander jobs to pay my rent and have splurge money. I used my loan money to travel with the A.M.E. Church and to be on the scene even when I really did not have to be.

I loved the ecumenicalism of the Interdenominational Theological Center (I.T.C.). It showed me that it did not matter what your denomination was and that we all shared a common ground and that was to be faith leaders of today. The professors that I had and the lectures and preachers that I gleaned from them was immeasurable. I probably spent the most of my time with the mother of Womanist Theology, Dr. Jacqueline Grant, whom I worked for and was a personal assistant for. I took probably every theology course that was offered in my discipline because I had an interest in the study of God. There are not many male Womanist theologues in America, and I count myself as one of them.

As I progressed through Seminary I began preaching more and doing various workshops around the southeast. I was never in high demand, but certain pastors were always kind. I believe that is why I am very giving to seminary students or to anyone making academic progress for the betterment of themselves and the community they live and serve. As I closed my chapter in Atlanta, I felt I was at a crossroad of not having a church to pastor, recently being ordained and finding a secular job or finding a ministry that was willing and could financially support me. My home church pastor and I were on rocky terms. I would not listen wholeheartedly to him because I felt I knew as much as

him. He was a great preacher and father in ministry, but he did not possess the education and degrees that I had obtained, so I felt some kind of way about that. It was literally until I stop bucking the system that things began to change for me. I stayed in Panama about nine months until after our next conference. The bishop assigned me a church. I was very grateful to be able to have my opportunity to use my gifts and graces as a pastor.

My first assignment was New Bethel AME Church in Bonifay, Florida, in 2006. I received my appointment on a Friday night, and that Saturday morning I went to the church and had prayer, and I immediately began my recruitment tools and practices. As I began to prepare myself that Sunday morning, I had so many butterflies in my stomach, and it did not hit me until one of the stewardess called me and asked if there was anything she could do for her new pastor that morning. I lost it then because it hit me I was somebody's pastor. I stood by the local grocery store every week conversing with those who pass by. There was a car wash across the street, and I used to hang out there to show the guys that they needed to come on in the church to be tight with the young brother. It was working. There was an old dilapidated house on the church grounds that I stayed in weekly. The people and community loved me. I made a difference there in the thirteen weeks I was there. In hindsight, I should have stayed there and made a true mark rather than the bishop moving me to a supposedly bigger church. My "first" church still to this day can get anything from me. I go back there as often as I can to do whatever is asked of me.

Between 2006 and 2013, I pastored six other churches in the following cities: Leesburg, DeLand, Chipley, Key West, Marianna, and Malone. So after much prayer when conference time came in 2013, I was assigned to my current charge, the Mount

Zion Church in Crestview, Florida. This charge was a great charge a few years back. I arrived in Crestview as a family, and they did not even have enough money to pay me a salary that week. The finances just started flowing in. The people had a welcoming for me that was very nice where over ninety percent of the active church was there. I am loving this assignment, and the church is growing. I had to make some internal changes within the church ranks as well as within my personal life.

I would say my greatest strength is being able to communicate with all people on all levels. I think my biggest weakness is I trust too soon and am very naïve to a lot of these deceitful ways and people. I struggled in areas where I felt that I would be detached from people. I have had so many people close to me to leave me. On my way back from my first Intensive class, the man who inspired me and pushed me to go to work on my doctorate died as I was boarding the plane to come back home from my first week. So I know that I have a lot of shoulders to stand on and shoes to fill because people who I love and cherish have their spirit resting on me and they invested their time into me being the best I can be. I see young people not being faithful to the church as I was not stable in my church life and development and that is the reason I am so passionate about why people are leaving mainstream church and not excited about church right now. People are hurting and broken; and rather than come to the hospital for sinners, they chose to turn to alternative methods of seeking their higher power or watch television and never assemble together as likeminded believers praying on one accord to see what God has to say on the issues. I might have had eight churches in eleven years, but I desired to be faithful.

An Intersection of Context and Serving as Pastor

In serving as a pastor for eleven years a deep concern has been developed for African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. The concern is rooted in the fact that most men within that age group do not have an interest in attending or participating in church or its activities. Therefore, the study is designed to develop and implement teachings on discipleship that relate specifically to the needs of this group of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. The principal aim is to discover possible reasons why a significant number of African American males left an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Crestview, Florida. The research is designed to identify some of the problems that the church faces in recruiting and retaining young black males and present a number of solutions. Without the presence of African American males in churches to continue the legacy of their fore parents, the church will have limited growth.

Although targeting an AME church in Crestview, Florida it is not just an AME church problem, but also one that consists throughout all denominations. Throughout the United States of America, many churches find that there is a shortage of black males in their congregations. This is not something that happened overnight but has been afflicting churches for decades. Failure to address the issues and problems earlier and denying the fact that there were problems has led to the massive exodus of African American males in churches. Unfortunately, the leadership of our churches has stuck their heads in the sand and pretended that all was well or that this was just a phase that the church was going through, which aided in the progression of the exodus. There has been a mass exodus of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty

in mainstream church and the number one reason why people stop coming to any given church was reported by “over 91% people citing the significant factor or main reason being conflict and gossip.”²

Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church located in Crestview, Florida, is one hundred ten years old, going strong and steep in African Methodist tradition. The church is certainly a staple in the community. It is referred to as the “Little White Church at the Corner of Edney and McDonald Street.” There have been great ministries birthed at Mount Zion and with the right undertaking there will be plenty more to come. There were only two African American churches in Crestview: Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church and Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. When Mount Zion A.M.E. Church burned, a bond was made and still remains with Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church. The churches worshipped an alternated Sundays to worship at Macedonia. Macedonia held services first and third Sundays and Mt. Zion held services second and fourth Sundays. This was really the beginning of “Metho-Baptist” in Crestview.

The city of Crestview received its charter from the Florida legislature and was officially incorporated in 1916. Crestview’s name was chosen because it was located on the peak of a long woodland range between the Yellow Shoal Rivers, which flow almost parallel on the east and west side of the city. After Okaloosa County was formed by the state legislature in 1915, from portions of western Walton County and eastern Santa Rosa County, Crestview became the county seat in 1917 and remains so today. Crestview is located at the junction of three major highways: U.S. 90, State Road 85, and Interstate 10,

² Richard J. Krejcir, “Why Churches Fail: Part I - Church Leadership,” Institute of Church Leadership Development, last modified 2007, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42339&columnid=4545>.

which resulted in its acclaimed designation as the “Hub City” of northwest Florida. The City is fifty miles east of Pensacola, Florida, 120 miles west of Tallahassee, Florida, and thirty miles inland from the beautiful Gulf of Mexico. Crestview’s elevation of 235 feet above sea level places it as one of the highest points in the state.

The city of Crestview formally adopted the Community Redevelopment Agency concept in 1995 for the expressed purpose of development and redevelopment within a defined community redevelopment area, which encompasses all of the downtown area. The Community Redevelopment Board adopted a Community Redevelopment Plan, which was sanctioned by the Florida Department of Community Affairs. In 1997, the City applied, and was approved for a Main Street Program Secretary of State.

In 1998, the city of Crestview hired a full time Main Street Program Director and assisted in the establishment of the Mina Street Crestview Association, Inc., whose membership consisted of business owners, citizens and other interested parties desiring to revitalize the downtown area. From 1996 through 2003, Crestview embarked on a three-phase development effort to construct a major streetscape project in the Community Redevelopment Agency area. All three phases were earmarked for the restoration of Main Street to the tune of \$3.7 million, funded by Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenues, state grants and general revenue funds.

In Crestview, you will find an assortment of comfortable homes, churches, schools, recreational facilities, businesses, and industries all working together as a happy, growing city. The city’s public safety departments, under a stable and prosperous city government working to make this city a wonderful place to live, protect all these things

while the related services of the city ensure we uphold our commitment to provide services second to none.

According to the 2010 census,

The total population for Crestview, Florida is 20,978. The city has a total area of 12.8 square miles. The racial makeup of the city in 2010 was 67.7% White; 18.6% African American, 6.6% Hispanic or Latino; 3.1% Asian; 4.4% Two or more races; 0.5% American Indian and Alaska Native; and 0.3% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. The median household income in Crestview is \$49,423.00 and the present of people living below the poverty level is 18%.³

Crestview's economy is mostly driven by military, tourism, real estate and manufacturing. The most common occupations in Crestview are: Building and groundsleaning and maintenance occupations; sales and related workers including supervisors; customer service representatives; secretaries and administrative assistance; cashiers; cooks and food preparations workers; law enforcement workers including supervisors. The most common industries in Crestview are: public administration; accommodation and foodservices; health care; construction; professional, scientific and technical services; educational services; and department and other general merchandise stores.

There are sixteen K-12 schools in Crestview, Florida. Crestview public schools belong to the Okaloosa School District with fifteen public schools and one private school center. The 2012-2013 school year total enrollment for schools in Crestview is 8,048 students. The minority enrollment is 32% of the total student body and the student-teacher ratio is 16:1. Each school is committed to providing challenging and safe educational experiences to all students. The students in the Okaloosa County school district are given all the opportunities available to acquire the knowledge and skills

³ "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, last modified March 27, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>.

needed for responsible citizenship, personal development and lifelong learning. There are two schools of higher education located in Crestview: the Northwest Florida State College, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). In August 2012, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) opened a College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Crestview, Florida. Students on the Crestview campus are linked via synchronous distance-learning technology and receive didactic instruction simultaneously with Tallahassee students in real time.

There are seventy-three churches in Crestview, Florida. With each church comes a community that is caring and active in their faith, and ready to welcome members and visitors. All of the congregations in the greater Crestview area are working with one another to ensure spiritual growth in the city. They share the responsibilities of caring for the physical, spiritual, and mental health of all citizens, young and elderly, the privileged and the needy, the healthy and the sick. The Crestview community believes that God has given the church a Great Commission to proclaim the Gospel to all nations so that there might be a great multitude from every ethnic group and language group who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. As ambassadors of Christ, we must use all available means to go to the people and not wait for them to come to us.

Mount Zion is partnering with the Department of Children and Family (DCF) once each month to provide citizens in the community with transportation services for monthly food assistance, Medicaid, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. The local representative for the Affordable Health Care Act is at the church assuring that everyone has access to affordable health care. We also partner with our neighbor, the Masonic Lodge, who sponsors the community Easter Egg Hunt and Picnic and an Annual

Health Fair. The church is involved with the local Kiwanis Club. Mt. Zion is active in youth sports and sponsor meals to various sports teams. During December 2013, we sponsored a coat drive and gave over four hundred coats to the less fortunate. The Church School department sponsors a quarterly "Lock In" to promote the importance of our local church school. We have reinstated a Kiddie College to serve underprivileged youth with their homework and provide a Christian based positive environment to mentor the underserved population with structured recreation, food, and fellowship. The first annual Mt. Zion 5K Run/Walk will be held the last Saturday in April. We are also helping to build a Habitat for Humanity home.

The growth potential is definitely around the corner for Mt. Zion. The key to growth is to tap into the base alignment with the Special Forces Unit out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina that are based at Duke Field, who have left their families in Crestview. We are instituting programs to draw these military families into our family here at Mt. Zion. Even though these families may not be in the Crestview area but a few years, it is our desire to make positive differences to attract them to our ministries. We are working toward city-wide billboards advertising our ministries and also additional partnerships with local businesses. Mt. Zion has seventy-nine members on roll and the average attendance on Sunday is fifty-two members. I have been blessed with the patience and understanding to treat and love seniors like my grandparents. Although the growth potential is evident, Crestview and neighboring churches are all faced with the decline of African American men attending and participating in church on a regular bases. Therefore, the problem is a harsh reality and needs to be addressed to alleviate the mass exodus.

The topic of retaining young adult males is sensitive for many reasons. However, one experience vividly stands out in my mind as I listened to a voicemail message of an active twenty-two-year-old member. The message indicated that the young member wanted to end membership effectively immediately. The member stressed that he would not attend any services, meetings, or church activities. This was a traumatic shock because this young man had been a steward, on the finance commission, the young adult ministry, the single's ministry and the male chorus. He was the third generation living in the household. His grandmother was a prominent leader and "pillar" of the church. His mother did not attend church services. It appeared that he was a happy and dedicated member of the church. Naturally after receiving such a message, I was confused and wondered what had happened? I made an appointment with the young man and had several heart-to-heart conversations regarding the mass exodus of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. There are many African American males in our churches who are implicitly or explicitly telling pastors to remove them from church membership rolls because they no longer want to be a part of ministries.

African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty in a rural community of northwest Florida are faced with many mental and physical challenges. The aim of this qualitative study is to research and identify the reasons that the young men within this age group are leaving the church. This study will also create a model to teach pastors and laymen how to reach and reclaim African American men between the ages of twenty-one to forty.

Most men in our society today do not see the value of going to church because it is not speaking their language, and it is not addressing the issues they face. Men want

questions answered about work, family, marriage, sexuality and finances. These topics are rarely addressed from the pulpit today. Men want to be involved in something driven by a compelling vision. Men want to know what hill the church is climbing, where the church is going, and what the church is about. The church has the greatest and most far-reaching mission on earth. Men want to win, they want to be heroes, and they want to come in first. In many instances, men do not accomplish these tasks because there is no father figure in their homes or in their lives.

Without a father to illustrate the components of manhood or affirm their maturity, men are often left without direction or guidance. For that reason, mothers become the secondary option, which results in the continual struggle or challenge of an identity crisis and providing a viable crutch to become dependent on women to affirm the manhood. In this world, there is no substitute for a father in masculine development. Fortunately, the Heavenly Father is perfect, accepts and has open arms to welcome those men who are lost and hurting. we can always turn to Him. It is only as a man turns to God that needs can be met and filled in.

If you feel rejected from your earthly father, you have to admit the feeling of rejection to yourself and let the hurt, pain and anger from it come to the surface. You must turn all of that over to God, the Heavenly Father, and forgive your earthly father. Your earthly father is a product of his own father's failings as well. Let Jesus fill the empty places in your life. He suffered the ultimate Father rejection just so He could heal you of those very things.

My grandfather who taught and coached thirty-nine years in Atmore Alabama was my in home role model. He was the father figure that I looked up to and respected.

There were countless numbers of times he taught me the ropes of life in which I will always cherish. I was an inquisitive young lad who wanted to be an attorney at the tender age of four. My childhood was grounded in the Word of God. The household was divided. My grandfather was a staunch Methodist and the rest of the family members were Baptist. I was very intrigued with the devotional services that the Deacons conducted in my formative years in the Missionary Baptist Church that kept me going back for more.

As pastor of an African Methodist Episcopal Church, I have observed the mass exodus of all mainstream church congregations. Many opportunities of speaking with people of all denominations have been granted and many have grown weary of the standard model of business as usual in the church. Some do not want to have responsibilities in worship and some are not excited about church. It is apparent that there is a missing link from the college-aged worshipper to the late forty-aged adult. There is a working class of members that get wrapped up in their mediocre jobs and they don't have time for the church and neglect to give God what is due God. We all have "Caesars" in our lives but we have mistaken and misquoted what we owe. We have changed "Render to Caesar" to "Surrender" and that is why our barns are not filled with enough grain and manna to sustain us. Reclaiming the young adult males is of relevance to me because I fall within the lost category at the age of thirty-six years old.

One experience that I witnessed as it relates to the things deposited as a child is through an experience of my brother. He was reared eighteen years of his life getting up going to Sunday School, then church while he was under his guardian's (adopted by grandparents' him) roof. As he matriculated to college, he did not attend church for

months arguably because of one thing or another. When he would return home, he would frequent the home church. As he ventured into the secular world and met his wife and they had children, he instilled those same core values of Church School and church attendance into his children that were instilled in him as a child. The belief is that the inapt training and prayers that were at the root of his maturation were embedded in the fiber of his inner man and he could not erase his upbringing in the church. Therefore, he passed the same teaching and training to his children, although he was not actively engaged in church at the time.

Dr. Richard J. Krejcir stated that “the number one reason people stop coming to any given church was conflict and gossip.”⁴ There is a pink tornado within our mouth that is the poisonous and venomously deadly tornado. While if it can momentarily tamed and constrained, a supermajority of things said erroneously would not have even entered the atmosphere. Our tongue is used in various gyrations to get thoughts across.

Church as we know it now will continue to fail this genre of believers as daily changes occur in the lives of people if a remedy is not put in place to alleviate the mass exodus. Unfortunately, the church is no longer the first point of entry when young men are faced with the struggles of life. The current day generations often feel lost in “church” because the worship experience does not provide a holistic need. There are oriented services and ministries that offer promises of successful ways of living in the present world filled with technological and personal relationship challenges. The church has seen a paradigm shift that has swung so far to the left that it is so conservative and

⁴ Richard J. Krejcir, “Why Churches Fail: Part I - Church Leadership,” Institute of Church Leadership Development, last modified 2007, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://www.Churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42339&columnid=4545>.

suffocates the Generation X and late Baby Boomers due to the church's inability to foster, nurture, and retain relationships with all age groups. The church is so far to the right at times that we miss the working middle class because we are trying to entertain them in worship service in a club or concert atmosphere. Church has become one of the institutions where people want membership, but only want to be connected when it benefits them for free.

The competition with televangelists and the convenience of streaming live religious services and online giving has given way to the saints of old who had to come to the consecrated four walls to fellowship with likeminded individuals because they lived so far away and had no weekly communication but on Sundays. We now can email, text, or Skype in a matter of seconds to stay connected to each other.

With all the melodrama in church, the mind has to ponder, is Gutenson correct when he wrote in *Church Worth Getting Up For*:

Because if I can have the same Sunday morning feeling from the comforts of my home without burning gas, finding cash to put in the various offerings, or writing expensive checks, then I can watch my sports broadcast that comes during primetime television just as the Pastor is about to take the morning text.⁵

The days of Grandmamma and Big Momma making you get up and go to Sunday school and church are gone because the burden of obligation is not there. The relationship base of the core of why for centuries we took pride in putting on our "Sunday go to Meeting" clothes to get to the church is all but obsolete and irrelevant in the twenty first century.

This entire endeavor of this doctoral experience with emphasis on this thesis and project was designed to develop and implement teachings on discipleship and evangelism

⁵ Charles E. Gutenson, *Church Worth Getting Up For* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2013).

that would address identifying and evangelizing African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty at Mt Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Crestview, Florida. Without the presence of African American males in churches to continue the legacy of their fore parents, the church will have limited growth.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

One of the glaring aspects of ministry is that males, young men in particular, are woefully absent from the life of the church. In many churches most of the males are middle age or elderly and young boys, most of whom are brought to church by a mother or grandmother. This has not always been the case. Young men were at one time present at worship service and actively participated in the life of the church. What happened to change this? The answer is complex. As a young male who is a minister and serves as pastor of Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Crestview, Florida, I see the absence of young males in church. This reality is not confined to the church that I serve nor its denomination. Throughout most Protestant traditions, young men are largely absent from worship. There are reasons for this absence. As I survey my context at Mt. Zion African Methodist Church (from this point referred to as Mt. Zion Church), I am compelled to address this from a faith based perspective, yet employing the lens of social sciences.

There are glaring parallel of people of faith in our present society to that of those in the biblical drama. This parallel include the good and bad, concerned and indifferent as well as the faithful and back sliders. I see the absence of black males in the twenty-one to forty category largely absent from church. As a public school teacher, I see how many

young adolescent males drop out of school. There are parallels here as well. African Americans have come a long way since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voter's Rights Act of 1965. Black males have ascended to the presidency, the U. S. Senate and House of Representatives, governor's mansion, state legislatures, along with becoming mayors and council members of local municipalities. Black males are college presidents, CEO's of Fortune 500 Companies, astronauts, engineers and the list goes on. They are also school teacher, principals and counselors. Many black males are hardworking family men who hold lower paying jobs, yet they seem to be resilient. On the other end of the spectrum, black males are incarcerated and otherwise tied into the criminal justice system on parole or probation. They face a higher percentage of being unemployed, arrested for minor violations, disproportionately killed by law enforcement and more. Many of these black males are not involved in the life of the church; more specifically, they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many of these black males have never been introduced to a life of faith. The only time some have been in church was for a funeral or an occasional Mother's Day. Some of these males were brought up in church, but something happened. They came of age and were no longer compelled to attend church. So the work of this thesis (and the subsequent project) is to become a clarion call of God to those who have never heard the call or the invitation and to bid those who have left to return. This returning is to church of course; but more poignantly, it is to return to God as expressed in the outreach of Jesus. This includes the people of faith to be open to the claim that God has on us to witness and disciple but also be open to new wine skins in the approach to sharing the gospel to black males, many of them who are wounded and frail. Hopefully, they will hear, as in the days

of the people of old, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1). What an invitation this is. May God help us as we as people of faith evangelize to everyone for sure, but for the context of this thesis, for black males in particular.

Old Testament Foundation: Isaiah 55:1-5

The title of this doctoral thesis is “A Model to Evangelize and Recruit African American Males Ages 21 - 40 at Mt Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church.” Initially I started out with the thought of how to “retain” this demographic of people at the church when it dawned on me that retaining these persons is not the only concern. Of more importance, however, is the “evangelizing and recruiting” of this age group. My hypothesis is that if this group is to be reached with the “word” of God and the “love” of God, a concerted effort must be made to them in outreach recognizing the many obstacles that stand in the way of making this a reality. One glaring reality is the hypocrisy and the relevance of the church for a black male living in a racist society. Hence, I have chosen for my Old Testament foundational text Isaiah 55: 1-5.

Historical Content

The Book of Isaiah

This text is taken from the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is the first of the “Latter Prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and “the Twelve”). “It is also the oldest

Hebrew MS codices (tenth and eleventh centuries A.D.)¹ For centuries many believed that the entire book of Isaiah was that of the eighth century prophet Isaiah; however, “Jewish scholars were not satisfied that the entire book was from the pen of Isaiah. Such, indeed, is the general view today.² There is uncertainty and disagreement as to how many persons are represented as the prophet Isaiah in this book. C. R. North asserts,

There is an obvious break in the subject matter of the book at the end of ch. 39, and another almost equally obvious at the end of 55. Even if chs. 40-66 are predictive prophecy from the pen of Isaiah, it is convenient to deal with the sixty-six chapters under separate headings (1-39; 40-55; 56-66). The text under discussion, Isaiah, 55:1-9 falls in this second group.³

Biblical scholarship since the nineteenth century has demonstrated persuasively that the book of Isaiah is attributed to at least three “Isaias.”⁴ The Isaiah under discussion here is not to be confused with the Isaiah of (chapter 1-39) who was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea and Micah, at least of the eighth century. “It is almost universally agreed that the historical background of at least chs. 40-48 is the Babylonian exile (sixth century B. C.).”⁵

The authorship of chapters 40-55 is attributed to another source other than Isaiah 1-39. Scholars are of different thoughts about how many persons are represented in the book of Isaiah. As to the author of chapters 40-55, “Nothing is known of the author who

¹ C. R. North, “Isaiah,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, E-J, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 734.

² North, “Isaiah,” 734.

³ North, “Isaiah,” 734.

⁴ David L. Peterson, “Introduction to Prophetic Literature,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol VI, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 28.

⁵ North, “Isaiah,” 737.

is generally referred to as Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah, occasionally the “Babylonian Isaiah.” It is probable that he lived in Babylonia, though Palestine, and even Lebanon or Egypt, have been suggested.⁶

There is debate as to whether or not the prophets actually were writers. Hence, there were scribes for some and other material has come to the Canon through what is considered “authorizing” writers who wrote in the prophet’s name. While there is considerable amount of information shared about the author of Isaiah (chapters 1-39), little is known of Deutero-Isaiah of (chapters 40-55). Christopher N. Seitz points out the things that we do not know about him. He is not identified by name nor does he refer to himself in first person until the 48th chapter. He does not use the term “prophet to identify himself” nor do others.⁷ This unit of Second Isaiah begins with chapter 40. On the lips of the prophet are the words:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORDS’s hand double for all her sins (vss 1-3, NRSV).

This may seem like a call to this prophet, but maybe not.

The opening pericope is not as many have noted, a call narrative, however much we may feel entitled to one at the point of entry into this material and however much it may resemble such a narrative. The voices that speak are those from the heavenly council. We are meant to know that the voices who addressed Isaiah in former times with a word of judgment for God’s people are here, as in chap. 6, deferential to the word the Lord has spoken.⁸

⁶ North, “Isaiah,” 738.

⁷ Christopher N. Seitz, “Introduction to Prophetic Literature,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VI, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 319.

⁸ Seitz, “Introduction to Prophetic Literature,” 319-320.

Second Isaiah, many scholars believe, concentrates more on the prophecies than on the individual prophet. As for dates and times of this prophet's work and life, there is uncertainty.⁹ Between First Isaiah and Second Isaiah, "a century and a half" of time had expired.¹⁰ What can be ascertain is that this prophet lived and prophesied during the six century B.C.¹¹ One scholar wrote, there was a tremendous need for a prophetic voice during and after the exile "to expound the meaning of the exile itself and explain how that shattering experience was to end in the triumph of God over the power of sin. If there had been no Second-Isaiah, then we should have had to invent one."¹²

Literary Background

Unlike much of the narrative in Isaiah (1-39) and many prophetic books, Second Isaiah is composed of largely as oracles.¹³ This book has been called the "Great Prophecy of Comfort, and was regarded as a fine specimen of Hebrew literature and a unique product of imaginative prediction.¹⁴ There is in this book of Second Isaiah, literary homogeneity as it pertains to "a list of peculiarities of grammar, diction, and

⁹ R. N Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), ix.

¹⁰ James Berkeley, *Knowing the Old Testament* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1954), 99.

¹¹ Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, x.

¹² George Knight, *Prophet of Israel (I) Isaiah*, Bible Guides, eds. William Barclay and F. F. Bruce (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1961), 34.

¹³ Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, x.

¹⁴ Charles Cutler Torey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 4.

phraseology.¹⁵ Much of this book is primarily concerned with oracles as opposed to narrative and history. As far as this is concerned, much of the expressions off of the lips of prophets is viewed as oracles. An oracle is understood to be “speech, utterance, pronouncement. It is an introductory formula to a divinely inspired message. These Hebrew words are used in prophetic literature.”¹⁶

The literary concerns of this book is also one that is shared with much of the literature of the bible, especially among the prophets. Most will agree that all of the bible reading and interpretation is not taken literally.

“The question whether the exuberant language of the prophet is to be taken literally, or whether it is only so much poetic hyperbole. Did he expect the journey back to Palestine to be effected in the wonderful way he describes? And, if he did, must we set him down as a deluded enthusiast? Was he, in fact, a poet-prophet of the sixth century? Or was he a poet of ca. 400 whose imagery need not be taken literally.”¹⁷

This is understood against the backdrop that there was no mass return to Israel until the time of Ezra in 400 B.C.¹⁸

Analysis

People are quick to point out that one particular book, prophet or passage towers above others in importance in scripture. Lay and clergy alike have particular favorites in this regard for different reasons. Many times such reason resonates with some life

¹⁵ Torey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation*, 4.

¹⁶ I. Mendelson, “Oracles,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, K-Q, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 607

¹⁷ C. R. North, “Isaiah,” 741.

¹⁸ C. R. North, “Isaiah,” 741.

experience of the individual. In the grand sweep of things, such can be said of Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55). This unit

. . . plays a role in the development of some of the great themes of Jewish and Christin theology. In particular the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of God, as unique, as creator of all things, as Lord of history as almighty, righteous, loving, merciful and holy and as Saviour and Redeemer of his people owes a great deal to the teaching of Deutero-Isaiah. His role in the development of doctrine was not so much that of an innovator as of one who articulated with greater clarity than his predecessors the theological understanding of God and the world which he had inherited, and was the first to expound these themes coherently in their relation to one another.¹⁹

This is understood, of course, as a matter to the entire book

The prophet's mission of Second Isaiah was to "comfort and inspire the Jews of the Babylonian exile, and to predict their release by Cyrus, and the 'restoration' of Judea and Jerusalem, which had been unoccupied since the sack of the city and the destruction of Solomon's temple by the armies of Nebuchadrezzar."²⁰

The Text: Vss 1-2 – The Invitation

This block of work (Second Isaiah) concludes what many scholars, but not all, believe is chapter 55. The opening verse of chapter 55 is one that is eye catching and more. An invitation is extended to come. "Like street vendors hawking their wares in an open market, the speakers announce a feast to everyone. Water carriers hawk their wares with words 'O thirsty one. Water.'"²¹ How gracious this must be to those who first heard

¹⁹ Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, x.

²⁰ Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928, 4.

²¹ John D. Watts, "Isaiah 34-66," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce Metzger (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 817.

these words as well as those who hear them today. This is especially so when one “considers the invitation in 55:6 to a banquet where God will announce his decision to remove the people from the disgrace from the land.²² The opening words, “Come,” are strange and unique. “What is different and strange here is the thing which the imperative summons men to do: buy and eat. This is to be taken metaphorically and depart from the summons to hear.²³

While most commentators believe that the invitation is to those Israelites in Babylonian captivity, others are so sure. It is argued that the Hebrews/Israelites did not have an initiative of evangelism; however, it did have in place a process whereby non Jewish persons could come into the faith. Nonetheless, it is in the work of this prophet that we see God’s revelation to humankind changing. Isaiah 49:6 speaks to Israel as being “a light to the Gentiles.” This story, along with the story of Ruth with Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law as being in the genealogy of Jesus, shows a marked difference from the nationalistic stories and views of Nehemiah and Ezra. Of this invitation in verses 1-3, August Pieper writes,

the gentiles, not the people of Israel, are addressed in this passage? Not one word in the entire section points to Israel; everywhere the gentiles are indicated. Up to this point, Israel has been in the foreground of the prophecy; what is more natural than that the Lord should now finally turn His attention to gentiles? . . . the Lord, so to speak, poured out His heart to Israel. Is it likely that now, in the application, He should overlook the gentiles altogether? But the strophe itself, by its contents, clearly shows that it is specifically the gentiles who are ere being addressed.²⁴

²² Watts, “Isaiah 34-66,” 817.

²³ Clauss Westermann, “Isaiah 40-66,” in The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 281.

²⁴ August Pieper, *Isaiah: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66*, trans. Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), 478-479.

This text (verses 1-3) clearly shows that a most gracious invitation is being extended to a weary people. Pieper seems to be in the minority as to whether the invitation is to the Israelites or Gentiles – or could it be both. Again, Pieper makes the point that the Davidic covenant or grace had already been established since II Samuel 7 and it needed only to be fulfilled. Peiper writes,

If no more were meant here than the covenant as it applied to Israel, then we might have expected the prophet to write ‘*ekhrethah ittekhem*, ‘I will make a covenant *with you*,’ which is the usual form of the expression. But instead of that usual form, we have here ‘*ekhrethah lakhem – for* you. Although the gentiles are thus indicated as beneficiaries of the covenant, which had indeed always included them, yet it had not been concluded *with them*, but *for them*.²⁵

This is a strong argument that the invitation is for both the Israelites who had been in Babylonia captivity for years as well as the Gentiles. Pieper uses both the nuances of the Hebrew language noting how the words *with* and *for* are used in alongside *you*.

Verse 1 opens with a call for attention. The Hebrew exclamation *hoy*, usually indicating a lament, can also be a way of hailing people (Isaiah 18:1) and is expressed in our translation as “you there” rather than the usual “Ho” or “Hey.”²⁶ Water, that is offered, is the requirement of the soil. “There are echoes of the provision of water in the wilderness journey.”²⁷ And water is also symbolic of the spirit of God. When juxtaposed to the Old Testament during the exile, one sees a noticeable difference in the exhortation

Lam: 4, ‘We must pay to drink our own water,’ there is a considerable degree of care and compassion. Here the Lord’s word, which is compared to sustenance, is addressed to the nation which is desirous of salvation. He exhorts them

²⁵ Pieper, *Isaiah*, 480.

²⁶ Joseph Blakensopp, “Isaiah 40-55,” in *The Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol. 19a (New York, NY: Double Day, 2002, 369).

²⁷ Blakensopp, “Isaiah 40-55,” 369.

repeatedly, ‘Come!’ Three times in the first verse and the fourth time in verse 3.”²⁸

The exhortation to come offers water which is something that is essential for all life. Whereas many may take it for granted in that they live in an area where water is in abundance., this is not the case in many places. One commentary noted that the word *water* is used in the plural. “Not merely water, which is needed to maintain life at all, but wine and milk to strengthen, cheer, and nourish; the spiritual blessings of the Gospel are meant.”²⁹

A careful reading of these three verses (1-3) seems odd and contradictory. While the invitation to come it seems as gracious, the paradox lies in how can one buy and eat who does not have money. One commentary posits,

“. . . it is said, ‘ye spend money.’ A seeming paradox. Ye are really spiritual bankrupts: but thinking yourselves to have money – viz a devotion of your own making – ye lavish it on that ‘which is not bread’ – *i.e.* on idols whether literal or spiritual. Buy without money and without price is another paradox.”³⁰

Jamieson, Fausett and Brown, in their commentary, assert that this is a precursor to the understanding of Christ and all that he offers. “In A sense, we are to ‘buy’ salvation – viz, by parting with everything which comes between us and Christ, who has bought it for us, and by making it our own (Matt. xii:44,46; Luke iii:33; Rev. iii:18).”

²⁸ Shalom M. Paul, “Isaiah 40-66,” in *Eerdman’s Critical Commentary*. Translation and Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 4435.

²⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausett and David Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testament*, vol 2, Job – Isaiah (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 1997), 736.

³⁰ Jamieson, Fausett and Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testament*, 736.

Another approach to understanding the value of these three verses take on a somewhat different view point as to who the invitation is being extended to as well as the significance of the word *buy, eat, and water*. Christopher R. Seitz writes,

It is against this intertextual backdrop that the appeal to come to the waters finds its proper force? This possibility is strengthened by the references in chap. 54 to waters of destruction, now no longer a threat. Further support for this interpretation can be found by attending to the other image deployed in chap. 55. The force of the opening two verses is on (1) abundance and no cost, as against profitless striving, and (2) the concrete gifts of wine, milk, and bread. In later verses of the chapter, the provision of bread by God's creative power is likened to the power of God's word to accomplish what God desires (vv. 10-11).³¹

In this intertext context against the backdrop of First Isaiah, the invitation is not one of coming and buying at no cost; rather, “Chapter 55 capitalizes on the word of God from Isaiah’s day and sees it accomplishing what God intends in the present day.”³²

Paul D. Hanson puts a different spin on these three verses in the context of the main theme of the prophet’s message. He comments on how “it is a composition that burst with excitement . . . heaping up of interjections and imperatives.³³ A with other commentators he speaks of the chapter (54) that precedes this chapter as one of preparing the hearers to sense the gratuitous statement.

The echo of the Song of Hannah, recognizable in the call to the barren, desolate, and abandoned in 54:1-6, and its reiteration in the Magnificat remind us of the banquet scene where God ‘has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty’ (Luke 1:53).³⁴

³¹ Seitz, “Introduction to Prophetic Literature,” 481.

³² Seitz, “Introduction to Prophetic Literature,” 481-482.

³³ Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 177.

³⁴ Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 177.

It is of interest to note that this invitation is not limited to people of social standing or sufficient means. Nor is there a mention of the clothing attire.

The Text: Vss 3-5 – The Mercies

Whereas verses 1-2 speaks to the invitation fervently and in appealing words, verses 3-5 sets forth the mercies that are offered (as in that of David).³⁵ Commentators grapple with how the covenant that God made with David is operative against the backdrop of a disgraced people in exile. Where is the love of God in such an existence and experience?

But what of the contents of the covenant made with David, the promises of blessing, security, and peace? These promises, encapsulated in the phrase translated in the NRSV as ‘my steadfast, sure love for David’ (55:3b), were essential to Israel’s wellbeing. Without God’s beneficence, the Jewish people would be scattered and lost among the nations of the world. From the time of Abraham, through the age of Moses, and over the entire period of the monarchy, it was on the basis of the promises of the covenant that a remnant of the faithful preserved the light of God’s righteousness.³⁶

Verses 4-5 speak to that covenant’s recognition and God’s love. This seems to suggest that God’s plan was not defeated by the ruin of the royal house of David and is an everlasting covenant. This invitation and mercy would be extended to everyone who is obedient to God.

One of the reasons that this prophetic message has retained its relevancy through the ages is no doubt this pastoral concern. The message speaks to the heart with honesty and clarity. It is infused with a directness born of deep caring and empathy. What is more, the situation addressed is in essential respects one that persists for those who read Scripture today.”³⁷ Again, this compassion is one of the tenets of the covenant that may have seem to have been revoked or suspended

³⁵ Pieper, *Isaiah*, 478.

³⁶ Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 179.

³⁷ Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 179.

against the backdrop of the exile. But now, verse 3 reminds the hearer that this covenant is indeed an “everlasting” one.

As expressed in verse 1, the invitation to come is repeated in verse 3. The reader

of this block of chapters (40-55) of this prophet begins in chapter 40 with the words “comfort, O comfort.” This voice cries out in the wilderness. This verse (3) begins with “incline your ear and come.”

Nothing is required on the part of Israel but hearing and coming and taking: through these, it becomes pervaded by new life, and Jehovah presents it with an everlasting covenant, namely, the unchangeable mercies of David.³⁸

This reading, the text suggests, cannot get away from grace being extended and the everlasting covenant being tied to the promises of God to David and Israel. What may have seemed that the days of God’s covenant was over was indeed not over.

“It was inherently fragile, because conditional on the response of a people who always seemed unlikely to provide that response. Talk of a ‘lasting covenant’ confronts that by declaring not only that the days of a covenant relationship are not over, but also that the new covenant that Yhwh is now making will overcome the fragility of the old one.³⁹

The faithfulness of God is David extends also to the people of David. Those who listen and hear are open up to a new future. The covenant of God is something that God has not arbitrarily revoked. The people of the covenant are indifferent, or so it seems, in their attentiveness to their responsibilities. John Calvin has some unkind words to the people in this regard.

Yet there is an implied reproof; for they must be excessively stupid who, when they are so gently called, do not instantly obey. This is a remarkable passage, from which we see that our whole happiness lies in obeying the word of God. When God speaks in this manner, the object which he has in view is to lead us to

³⁸ Franz Delitzsch Leipzig, “The Prophesies of Isaiah,” in *Commentary on Isaiah*, Clark’s Foreign Theological Library, New Series, vol. xliv (London: T. & T. Clark, 1890), 325

³⁹ John Goldingay and David Payne, “Isaiah 40-55,” in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, eds. G. I Davies and C. M. Tuckett (London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2006), 371.

life; and therefore the blame liew wholly with ourselves, because we disregard this saving and life-giving word.⁴⁰

That life giving word is understood in the tangible expressions of the invitation to come, to buy without money and to eat and drink.

The text (vs 4) speaks of the covenant that God had made with David that was rooted in love. The emphasis on “everlasting” cannot be lost in this reading. God made David a witness, leader and commander for the people. Now the people, Israelites and others, will come. Yet, “God must *call*, before man *can*, or *will*, run. Not merely shall *come*, but *run* eagerly.”⁴¹

So this invitation to come, eat and drink is given that will surely appeal to those who live in draught, both physically and metaphorically. There coming too shall be in a hurry. Also striking in this invitation is that the appeal is “to ‘listen carefully’ and to ‘incline the ear’ – reversals of Isaiah 6 made possible by the proclamation of the servant in chaps. 40-52. The period of desolation is now over (6:11-12). But we must also be prepared for further refining (1:28; 6:13).”⁴² This is a reminder that God does more than want us to simply come and enjoy the fruits promised in the covenant but that the work of the faithful is ongoing and needs refining.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, “Isaiah 33-66,” in *The Book of Isaiah, Calvin Commentaries*, vol. VIII, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 158.

⁴¹ Jamieson, Fausett and Brown, *Job-Isaiah*, 736.

⁴² Seitz, “Commentary, 55:1-13,” in *The Book of Isaiah*, 482.

Conclusion

Reading and re-reading this passage, even without the benefit of pouring over commentaries, shows parallels with the gospel message and the teachings of Jesus. The words “come” and “eat” are poignant. The mercies extended to a people who are in bondage in the prophet’s day are similar to those in Jesus’ day, though there was a different kind of bondage. And then there is the reality of life today that so many face many of whom live in bondage. People of all cultures can relate to the powerful meaning of water in that it is essential for life and provide refreshment. African American males, especially those in the twenty-one to forty age group. are in need of this water. Not all of them are unemployed and on street corners. Some are in high tech and high paying jobs. Many in both group were once active in the life of the church, but no longer believe, and if they do, they do not act upon it in their connection to the church. To them, one and all, the invitation is extended: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.”

Introduction

Again, the focus of this thesis and project is to highlight the importance of evangelism and discipleship to Christian faith. These two aspects are the twin components of faith formation. This also speaks to the importance of being faithful to the commission of Jesus to his disciples on an appointment mountain in Galilee where he instructed them to go forth to the ends of the earth and preach and teach (Mt 28:16-29). This focus is addressed to African American males between the ages of twenty-one and forty at the church and community where I serve. The Old Testament foundational focus is Isaiah 55:1-5. The New Testament foundational focus is John 1:43-51.

Literary Content

The synoptic gospels, except Mark, are made up of genealogies, chronology, narratives, and parables primarily. For most of the synoptic gospels the parables begin with the phrase “the kingdom of God,” except for the gospel of Matthew which begins with the “kingdom of heaven.” Here Matthew is of the opinion that God’s name is not to be used lightly and thus “heaven” is used in the place of “God.”

The gospels – all of them – use “various literary techniques which have a common theological goal: to open up the world of the Gospel story to the world of the reader’s own experience. The Gospel’s dialogues and conversations seem to draw the reader into the stories as participants.”⁴³

There are few compact narrative units that make up much of the story of Jesus in the Synoptics, and little of the ethical teaching material found in the other Gospels. Instead, the Gospel of John is characterized by a literary style that interweaves narrative, dialogue, and discourse to create lengthy drama-like scenes (e.g. 4:4-42; 6:1-69; 9:1-10).⁴⁴

This suggest that the irony and symbolism, along with other literary devices, have a deeper meaning than that is actually being said.

The background of John (or anyone else), it seems to reason, would have an effect on his style of writing. Some scholars point to his Jewish origins in his writings while others point to a Hellenist influence. J. N. Sanders writes,

The familiarity of John with the Jewish scriptures, both canonical and apocryphal, is sufficiently obvious, but does not of itself decide the issue. The Jewish scriptures were studied and valued by Gentiles as well as by Jewish Christians, and a familiarity with them does not necessarily argue a Jewish origin. Features of John which suggest more convincingly a Jewish and even Palestinian background are its language, its echoes of rabbinic ideas and methods of argument, and its

⁴³ Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. IX, Luke-John, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1005), 494.

⁴⁴ O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 493.

parallels in thought and language with the recently discovered documents of the Qumram community, though it must be remembered that all these are more or less matters of dispute.⁴⁵

Though there is a large degree of consensus among scholars that the book that bears the name the Gospel of John was written from a viewpoint of John the disciple, there is wide spread dispute as to the exact identity or (identities) of that person.

The literary style of the synoptic gospels shows Jesus traveling to many towns and villages preaching and teaching, “the Kingdom of God” (or Heaven) is at hand. In these stories the serious student of the gospels sees some sort of chronology where certain parables were expressed and certain blocks of Jesus’ teachings took place. John, on the other hand, goes about a different literary and structural method.

John draws no lines between history and interpretation, story and theology. To try to separate what happened in the life of Jesus from its meaning is a false of the account of Jesus’ life and ministry in John, but instead recognized that, for John, the value of the events of Jesus’ life and ministry lies in their theological significance – what they reveal about God – and not in the events in themselves. In order to understand what John says about Jesus and God, then, one must attend carefully to how he tells his story. The literary style of this Gospel works in partnership with its theology to invite the reader into a new world shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus.⁴⁶

In short, this scholar’s viewpoint just shared above, is based upon her understanding of the text and seems to imply that though the place and time of each event has value, it is actually the deeper theological meaning that one truly finds the spirit of Jesus’ teachings and the face of God.

⁴⁵ J. N. Sanders, “Gospel of John,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, E-J, ed., George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 942.

⁴⁶ O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 495.

Historical Background

The Book of John

The book of John is located in the genre of the gospels and is the fourth book of the four gospel. Wherein the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke are considered synoptic gospels in that the bulk of their content is similar and seems to be derived from one “primary” source, the book of John is much different in many ways. Unlike the synoptic gospels, the Gospel of John does not have accounts of the birth of Jesus, his baptism, his temptations the Last Supper, the Gethsemane agony and prayer or the Ascension. This book also does not have the stories of people possessed by devils and evil spirits. And surprisingly, it does not have the parables. Comparing the synoptics to John, one sees also that there are different accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus.⁴⁷

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus’ ministry is concentrated in Galilee, mainly around the villages on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. He rarely leaves this area and only enters Jerusalem once and that is for the Feast of the Passover which led to the institution of the Last Supper, his agony in Gethsemane’s garden, his betrayal and subsequent crucifixion and resurrection. John, on the other hand, places Jesus primarily in Judea and in Jerusalem three times for different feasts and even an unnamed feast. Interestingly, Jesus never leaves Jerusalem after the tenth chapter.⁴⁸ There are other obvious differences between John and the synoptics as books. John puts the cleansing of the Temple at the

⁴⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, The Daily Study Bible Series, trans. William Barclay (Philadelphia, PA: The West Minster Press, 1956), 1-2.

⁴⁸ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 2.

beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13-22), while the others put it at the end (Mark 11:15-17; Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-46). John dates the crucifixion of Jesus on the day before the Passover, while the other gospels date it on the day of the Passover.⁴⁹

Galilee in the Days of Jesus

The gospel narratives of Matthew and Luke place Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea. Neither Mark or John has a nativity story of Jesus' birth. Because of the threat of King Herod to put to death all Jewish males under the age of two because of the threat of prophecy of a Messiah, Joseph and Mary fled to safety and landed in Egypt. When the threat of Herod had subsided, the Royal family returned to Nazareth of Galilee from which they once lived before travelling to Bethlehem because of the census. With the exception of Jesus in the Temple as a lad of twelve years old upon a family pilgrimage to Jerusalem, nothing else is said of Jesus' upbringing or life until he appears in the Jordan valley preaching.

Galilee in Jesus' day was a city of two or three hundred thousand. Its primary industry was derived from the Sea of Galilee (which is actually a lake). Among its commodities and exports, in addition to dried fish, were olives and wheat as well as wine. As in many communities of that day and the present, wealth was unevenly distributed. In addition to an upper class there was a somewhat large middle class than was common in ancient time. Jews compromised the overwhelming majority of Galilee during Jesus' day. And because of Roman rule, there was "a kindling expression of revolution activity,

⁴⁹ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 4-5.

especially after the second half of A. D. 40s onward.”⁵⁰ As mentioned earlier, the synoptic gospels point out that practically all of Jesus’ ministry took place in Galilee. After a time of ministry in Galilee, including preaching, “Jesus had to recognize that a thorough conversion of the Galileans was not taking place. He therefore pronounced divine judgment on the chief centers of his Galilean ministry (Mt 11:21-24par.).⁵¹

Judea in the Days of Jesus

During the time of Jesus, the area to which the name Judea was applied was a rather small region, Jerusalem and some of its outward boundaries. Judea is one of the three main regions of Palestine: Galilee, Samaria and Judea. Highways of commerce have always passed around Jerusalem.

Judea’s livelihood was pastoral and self-contained. The shallow and stony soil yielded olives and grapes, figs and citrus, and some grain in the valleys. The Dead Sea yielded common salt, and in later times other minerals such as potash became profitable. The greatest wealth of Judea was the annual half-shekel temple tax laid upon all male adult Jews by the Torah, which brought large and regular contributions from the Diaspora. The wealth of Judea, as well as its population, was concentrated about JERUSALEM.⁵²

The Jewish population of Judea has been estimated at 200,00, half of whom resided in Jerusalem and approximately one-fifth of them being priest.⁵³ Many pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem for the festival times. There were seeds of rebellion among a few Jews

⁵⁰ H. Risner, “Galilee,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Breen, Scot McKnight, I Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 252.

⁵¹ Risner, “Galilee,” 253.

⁵² K. W. Clark, “Judea,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, E-J, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962. 1012.

⁵³ Clark, “Judea,” 1012.

(Zealots). A roman military post was assigned to Judea, mainly Caesarea and Jerusalem. And as the gospel narratives point out, Pontius Pilate was governor.

John the Disciple

Theological training with its emphasis on biblical studies presents some issues that are quite different from one's introduction to the bible and the Jesus of the Gospels. More than a few persons have read the stories of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and have looked into the eyes of Jesus as the Son of God; and often we see ourselves in the stories that Jesus tells as it relates to the conversations with individuals. We see ourselves in these person in the context of the traits: both good and bad. We too have developed favorite gospel writers (disciples) and sometimes are sure who they are, especially Matthew, Mark and John. After all, they were disciples, right, and close to Jesus. We also are taught and led to believe that Mark was written by a protégé of Peter who recorded his stories. Deep exploration into biblical studies, however, has led us to doubt this certainty, in part, if not outright reject it. A multitude of scholars suggest that "Each of the Four Gospels represents the attempt of a particular community, working through a scribe or group of scribes, to set down dependable traditions about Jesus. These traditions, each writer claims, have been lived out faithfully by disciples down to his own day.⁵⁴

People of faith, lay and clergy alike, are first introduced to John – via preaching, bible study and Sunday school – as the son of Zebedee and a fisherman from Jerusalem.

⁵⁴ Sloyan, *John*, 2.

Hence, the book of John was written by John the disciple himself. This neat set of beliefs serves many people well; however, the certainty behind this is problematic, which means that the author of this gospel in all probability was not John. J. N. Sanders writes, “... John was written by a man of Jewish origin, familiar with Palestinian background of the story which he had to tell, who was also anxious to make his message intelligible to a predominantly Gentile audience.”⁵⁵ On the other hand there are others thoughts about John’s (the writer’s) identity. “Its author was a Platonist who was committed to the gospel tradition, said one group of scholars earlier in this century. It was written by a diaspora Jew whose milieu was the Hellenist Judaism characteristic of the Stephen part; it is more modernly said.”⁵⁶ Some scholars are of the opinion that the Gospel of John, as do all of the gospels and much ancient literature, comes to us anonymously. The title “According to John” (*kata loannen*) is derived from the tradition that the Gospel was written by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. The content of the Gospel suggests that it was not written by an eye-witness or by one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.”⁵⁷

When one looks beyond the scholarship of the book and the “individual” John, much of this lack consensus; the gospel (all four) is clear about some aspects of John. His is one of the first disciples of Jesus, the son of Zebedee and Salome, a brother of James and a fisherman. He is also considered to be, though not a persons of great means,

⁵⁵ J. N. Sanders, “Gospel of John,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol 2, E-J, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 942.

⁵⁶ Gerald Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 1.

⁵⁷ M. M. Thompson, “Gospel of John,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Breen, Scot McKnight, I Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 369.

somewhat of modest means in that he and his brother (and father possibly) owned a boat and made a living off of this work. He is also a Galilean.

Analysis of Text

Many scholars have put in place what they consider to be a proper outline of John's gospel. There is no unanimity on this subject. However, a considerable number of biblical scholars have found common ground in an outline. For this group the outline that follows is used by many persons who undertake a systematic study of this book. The Gospel of John is divided into four sections in one account of its outline:

- I. Prologue: The Mission of God and the Incarnation of the Son (1:1-18)
- II. The Mission of the Son in Doing Signs and Giving Life ((1:19-12:50)
- III. The death of the Son and the Mission of the Disciples (13:1-19:42)
- IV. The Resurrection of the Son and the Mission of the Disciples (20:1-21:25)⁵⁸

The text (1:43-51) under discussion falls under the framework of this outline. The pericope that precedes this unit is 1:35-42 which is subtitled "The First Disciples of Jesus." In this pericope, John the Baptist recognizes Jesus from afar and proclaim him the Lamb of God, Rabbi/Teacher, Messiah, and Son of God. Two of the disciples that were followers of John the Baptist heard his comment on Jesus and followed Jesus. One of them was Andrew who later found his brother and brought him to Jesus. This was the beginning of the call of the disciples (the twelve) as recorded by John. This pericope leads to the text (John 1:43-51). From the onset of Chapter One, Jesus is recognized and acknowledged as the Son of God and have the ear of some of the disciples of John the Baptist who later become his disciple, notably Andrew.

⁵⁸ *The Wesley Study Bible*, NRSV, eds. Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 1285.

Vss 43-47

The day following Andrew and Simon (Peter) coming to Jesus, the text finds Jesus in Galilee. Jesus finds Philip and extends an invitation to him to “Follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, the same city of Andrew and Peter. It is of interest to note that Andrew and Philip are Greek names. This gospel places Philip, Andrew and Peter all from Bethsaida which differs from Mark’s gospel that places Peter’s home in Capernaum. One commentator suggests that, “Bethsaida has been introduced into John’s account because it means ‘place of hunting [fishing],’ and thus we have a symbolic reference to the theme of Matt iv 19: ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.’”⁵⁹ In any event, scholars have wondered as to the identity of the other disciple who was with Andrew when the two of them left from the company of John the Baptist to follow Jesus. There is some conjecture that the unnamed disciple here was the Beloved disciple John. As to the identity of this unnamed disciple, “a plausible alternative is Philip, a guess supported by the conjunction of Andrew and Philip elsewhere in the Gospels (6:58; 12:21-22).”⁶⁰

Verse 45 begins, “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’” The identity and history of Nathaniel is of interest for many reasons. Little is known of Nathaniel in the gospels or the rest of the New Testament. “Nathanael is not mentioned in the other gospels. The fact that his name occurs alongside those of

⁵⁹ Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel According to John,” I-XII, in *The Anchor Bible*, Introduction and Translation, Raymond E. Brown (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 82.

⁶⁰George R. Beasley Murray, *John*, Word Bible Commentary, vol. 36, eds. Donald Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1987), 26.

important apostles (John 1:35-51; 21:2) has led many to equate him with persons appearing in the Synoptics (Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, John the son of Zebedee, Simon the Cananaean), the most favored identification being Bartholomew⁶¹.

William Barclay describes Nathaniel's comment about Jesus' place of residency as "contemptuous."

There was nothing in the Old Testament which foretold that God's Chosen One should come from Nazareth. Nazareth was a quite undistinguished place. Nathanael himself came from Cana, another Galilean town, and, in country places, jealously between town and town, and rivalry between village and village, is notorious. Nathanael's reaction was to declare that Nazareth was not the kind of place that anything good was likely to come out of. Philip was wise. He said simply: 'Come and see.'⁶²

Nathanael's comments to Jesus seem cruel and condescending. Yet, Jesus' comments to him were complimentary. In Nathanael's approach to Jesus, Jesus responded, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is not deceit" (vs 47).

Jesus reveals the most about himself to the one who expressed skepticism and doubt (cf. the Thomas story, 20:24-29). Jesus hails Nathanael as an 'Israelite.' The term Israelite occurs only in v. 47 in John and is used to convey Nathanael's model faithfulness. Jesus may praise Nathanael because he accepted Philip's invitation even though he had questions.⁶³

This says much about Nathanael and about Jesus. Nathanael's response to Jesus is one of a witness and a confession. The text seems to suggest that Jesus' words to Nathanael are not a rebuke but a promise: "greater things."

⁶¹E. P. Blair, "Nathanael," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, K-Q, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 511.

⁶² William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 92.

⁶³O'Day, "The Gospel of John," 532.

Vss 48-49

During this exchange between Jesus and Nathanael in the presence of Philip, in response to Jesus' comment about him being a man in which there is no "deceit," Nathanael asks Jesus how is it that he knows him. The text seems to suggest that John, the writer of the gospel, "underlines Jesus' ability to know things beyond the normal human range. The impression that Jesus' statement makes on Nathanael, however, has led commentators to speculate about what Nathanael was doing under the tree. Sometimes rabbis taught or studied under a fig tree and even compared the Law to the fig tree . . . thus there arose a tradition that Nathanael was a scribe or rabbi."⁶⁴ There is also the suggestion that the "fig tree" was the place where Philip and Nathanael met and Jesus saw them there. On the other hand,

Is this as has been frequently suggested, an instance of Jesus being viewed as 'divine man,' possessing magical powers, such as the Hellenistic world knew. No. the OT is familiar with this kind of phenomenon among the prophet (cf. 2 Kings 6:8-12; Ezek 8:1-18; 21:21-23); Jesus has insight beyond that of the prophets, he is the Revealer to whom and through whom God communicates; hence, Nathanael confesses him as Son of God and King of Israel.⁶⁵

It is hard to nail down Nathanael regarding this conversation with Jesus. He is uncomplimentary in identifying Jesus as coming from Nazareth; yet, Jesus is complimentary to him. Jesus dazzles him with knowing him; and he acknowledges Jesus as the "Son of God and King of Israel." In Jesus, Nathanael saw something beyond a prophet with the ability to "see" things as of the "seers" of old that preceded the prophets.

⁶⁴ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 53.

⁶⁵ Murray, *John*, 27.

The pace in which John the gospel writer moves is swift. In the pericope of (1:35-42), Jesus is recognized as a teacher by two of the Disciples of John the Baptist before he has spoken a word. Immediately he is recognized as the Messiah, the long awaited one that the Scripture has pointed to. When Jesus speaks, he gives Simon the name “Cephas” (Rock) without explanation or background. Gerald Sloyan writes, “He [Jesus] exercises a preternatural recognition regarding Nathanael.”⁶⁶ John the gospel writer, Sloyan asserts, is writing more than a chronology or simply recording the events surrounding the calling of disciples; rather, he is putting forth in these words a Christology that will lead to the “Road to Nicaea.”⁶⁷

Vss 50-51

Verse 50 picks up in a response to Nathanael’s question about how did Jesus know him and his identification of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus comments to Nathanael is about how is it that he is coming to believe. “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” This comment to Nathanael may seem that it lessens his belief in Jesus. This, however, may not be the case.

Jesus’ word to Nathanael in v. 50 are not a rebuke but a promise. These words, too recall the story of Thomas (20:29). Jesus does not criticize the grounds of Nathanael’s faith, but suggests that Nathanael is only at the beginning point of his faith in Jesus. The ‘greater things’ Nathanael will see will be occasions for deepening faith.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sloyan, *John*, 26.

⁶⁷ Sloyan, *John*, 26.

⁶⁸ O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 532.

John the gospel writer shows how Jesus engages Nathanael and in so doing instills faith of “greater work” that will come from him because his faith will lead him to be the person that God intends him to be.

Verse 51 begins with a “very truly, I will tell you.” This is similar to other sayings of Jesus throughout the gospels. It is one of the speech patterns of the *Johannine Jesus* occurring twenty-five times. It is a distinct speech pattern that is used with a solemn tone. It is used to introduce a new thought.⁶⁹ This pericope and chapter concludes on a high note: “You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Here John the writer draws parallels with the Old Testament with rich allusions which shapes the book of John as a whole.

The verse combines images from the descent of the Son of Man in Dan 7:13 and Jacob’s dream ladder in Gen 28:12. John’s images thus stay constantly fresh and alive. The ladder of Gen 28:12 is replaced by the Son of Man, so that the Son of Man becomes the locus of God’s activity on earth. The Son of Man becomes the place where the earthly and the heavenly, divine and human, temporal and eternal meet.⁷⁰

This text asserts that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who is calling persons unto him as disciples and sharing with them not only teachings but truths of the Spirit of God.

Conclusion

This pericope, along with the one that precedes it, ends with four persons who would become disciples of Jesus. This unit speaks of Jesus being identified as the “Son of God.” It sees Jesus giving the name “Rock” to Simon and speaking with adulation of Nathanael as being a person in whom there is not “deceit” (guile). The unit also points to

⁶⁹ O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 532.

⁷⁰ O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 532-33.

“greater works” as being associated with persons who would follow him. Yet, this unit poses many questions for scholars. The main problem is that Nathanael is not listed among the writers of the synoptic gospel writers and is only mentioned on another occasion in a post resurrection appearance in John’s gospel (21:1-3). There is some conjecture that this Nathanael is actually Bartholomew in that Bartholomew is not mentioned in John’s gospel, and Nathanael is not mentioned in the synoptics. William Barclay posits,

. . . in the list of the disciples in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18, Philip and Bartholomew come together, as if it was natural and inevitable to connect them. Moreover, Bartholomew is really a second name. It means Son of *Tholmai* or *Ptolemy*. Bartholomew must have had another name, a first name; and it is at least possible that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person under different names. That certainly fits the facts.⁷¹

Notwithstanding the mystery of the unknown as it relates to Nathanael, the reader can walk away with more than a “genealogy” of the gospel writers being yoked together: Andrew and Peter, James and John, and Philip and Nathanael.

Speaking of the word yoked, is this not the calling of discipleship as is spills into the work of evangelism? Just as Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, and just as Philip brings his friend Nathanael, people of faith are called to share this love of Christ. This is at the center of faith. Discipleship and evangelism are the calling of every follower of Christ. The church in years past, at least many of them did, posted a sign with a word of “welcome.” This is inadequate today. Many people who were reared in the church no longer have this association. Many young people have reached adulthood and have never been “discipled.”

⁷¹ Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 94-95.

Number among the demographic that is absent from the life of the church in large number are African American males in the age group of twenty-one to forty. For sure, many in this group are active in the church. This demographic as a group faces the same obstacles in life that every group faces; however, there is another set of burdens that this group shares living in America with the burden of their skin being black. With this comes stereotypes as predators, criminals and lazy, to name a few. This group needs to hear the words of Jesus: “come.” This group needs sponsors (disciples and evangelists) such as Philip. This group needs to hear the words of Jesus “I see something in you.” This is why I am led by my passion for outreach and my context in my church and community to work toward listening to those in the wilderness, who are absent from a relationship with God, and bring them to a life of faith in Jesus and disciples of the church.

Every day in corporate America as well as various institutions, men and women are giving leadership and training in how to better connect and communicate with various demographics in society. Much of this is done to sell a product or to help people become more efficient in serving their constituents. The time has come for the leadership of the church, lay and clergy alike, to examine the social and cultural environment in which the people of God live and seek to become better servants in discipleship and evangelism. This requires more than prayer. It involves loving God with our minds enough to develop new “wine skins” in our discipleship and evangelistic outreach to the least, the last and the lost. This includes young African American males.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

As a pastor of an African Methodist Episcopal Church for ten years and having watched the mass exodus of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty, there is a need to provide a remedy within the church community to retain the African American male population while reclaiming those who have fallen away as well as evangelize others. Therefore, a historical review will be provided of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the role of black churches so that working together all denominations can corporately reclaim young African American males. We must learn from history to move forward into a brighter future.

It is imperative that the black church, that is if that expression has a meaning today, must revisit its history in order to make an assessment from whence it has come. This is needed because it forces the church to see its present existence against the backdrop of its history. That is to say that it will acknowledge the climate where it was birthed, view the historical and sociological conditions that made its birth and existence tenuous against the backdrop of a past that was more than racist but rooted in what many consider to be the vilest form of slavery known to human kind. In doing this, the church can look at its faith that brought it out of slavery, through a Reconstruction that was discontinued before its time, a society of Jim Crowism and lynchings, many of which

were not done in some back woods but in public. This review of its history will help the church to see that it was by faith through blood, sweat and tears, along with acts of courageous men and women who were not content to get ahead themselves, but who worked toward the uplift of the race, that the measure of freedoms that we have today as a race were made possible. Hence, this unit begins with the examination of the birth of the black church in a slave-era America.

Early History of the Establishment of Black Churches in America

The First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, birthed in 1777, is said to be the oldest black church in North America. It was originally called the First Colored Church.¹ In 1787, Blacks in Philadelphia organized the Free African Society, the first organized Afro-American Society. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were elected as overseers. They established contacts and created relationships with similar black groups in other cities. Five years later, this society began to build a church, which was dedicated on July 17, 1794. This African Church applied for membership in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. The end of the Confederacy signaled freedom for millions of southern black slaves and prompted the emancipation of the black church. This started the emergence of the black church as a separate institution in America. At that time, white southerners still sought to maintain control over African Americans' worship, for both religious and social reasons. Slaves had no voice in church affairs and were relegated to

¹ Marvin Andrew McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 96.

the rear of the church or the gallery as spectators rather than full members of the congregation.²

After the Emancipation, black churches became virtually the only place for African Americans to find refuge. In 1867 in Northumberland County, Virginia, African Americans petitioned for a separate church and the white members of Fairfield Baptist Church unanimously agreed to the request and the all black Shiloh Baptist Church was created. Once this church was established, black churches spread rapidly throughout the South.³

With the division of congregations came the development of a distinct religious observance combining elements of African ritual, slave emotionalism, southern suffering, and individual eloquence. Baptist and Methodist church services fused African and European forms of religious expression to produce a unique version of worship that reflected the anguish, pain, and occasional elation of nineteenth century black life in the United States.

The nineteenth century black churches ministered to the needs of the soul and served a host of secular functions, which placed them in the center of black social life. Church buildings were schools and community meeting centers, and during the Reconstruction Era, they were also political halls. The black church provided shelter for visitors and also temporary community theaters and concert halls where religious and secular plays and programs were presented. During this nineteenth century era, church members provided care for the sick or incapacitated and financial assistance to students

² McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 98.

³ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 101.

bound for college. They also sponsored many fraternal lodges. It was also during this time period that violence and terrorism ran rampant across the country, but black churches remained staunch in their resistance.⁴

In 1886, blacks organized the National Baptist Convention, in a continued attempt to reduce the influence of white national bodies among blacks. As the number of Baptist churches grew, they met regularly in regional conventions that evolved into statewide and national organizations. By 1895, the various Baptist associations had formed the National Baptist Convention of America, which represented three million African American Baptists who were primarily in the South.⁵

The Black Church: Establishing Its Identity

The term “the Black Church” presents many details of racial and religious lifestyles unique to black history. In essence, the term “the Black Church” implies that all black churches share or have shared the same aspirations and strategies for creating cohesive African American communities. This is not true, and there were numerous differences found among Black communities, which were reflected within their community churches. Black communities differed from region to region. They were divided along social lines, composed of persons from different economic levels, and maintained varying political philosophies. Black communities in the inner cities of the United States have traditionally differed from those in rural areas. In *The Negro Church in America*, the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier noted, “Methodist and Baptist

⁴ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 104.

⁵ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 106

denominations were separate church organizations based upon distinctions of color and what were considered standards of civilized behavior.”⁶

Organized politically and spiritually, black churches were not only given to the teachings of Christianity, but they were faithfully relied upon to address the specific issues which affected their members. For many African American Christians, regardless of their denominational differences, black churches have always represented their religion, community, and home.

It seems the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) along with the African American churches in general has deep intermixing. The church of yesteryear was mainly community-based and connected to the community in which it served. Everything flowed from the church and people were proud to fellowship from the church. Church leaders were not afraid to speak truth to power and to go against the grain and stand on their core belief to strengthen the family. The black church produced the finest institutions of higher education, and the pride that was portrayed through the tradition recently has no longer been sufficient. For example, when a puzzle is being constructed and you look at it from the box, it seems simple and easy to lay the pieces out and they all will gently fit into their perspective places. The unforeseen reality is that with hundreds of small pieces, one is bound to hide from you when you need it most. The puzzle will not be complete until every piece is in its respective place. Church leaders cannot sit idle; instead, leadership must be aggressive to reclaim the missing young adult male presence. In doing so, it is important to evaluate the role of church leadership.

⁶ African American Registry, “‘The Black Church,’ A Brief History,” accessed November 24, 2014, www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-church-brief-history.

History Revisited: Faith of Fathers and the Black Church

The Church Fathers' influence impacted our faith. These bishops, priests, deacons, and pious lay members of the ancient Christian Church contributed intellectually and pastorally to the development of both the East and Western Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant). Despite being of North African descent, Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril spoke and wrote in Greek while Cyprian, Tertullian, and Augustine wrote in Latin. Hence, both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches refer to them as the Greek and Latin Fathers. In the history of medieval Catholicism, European painters depicted some of these Fathers as white European men.⁷

African American Christians should understand the history of the early Church Fathers for the purpose of understanding the role Africans played in shaping Christian tradition before the tragic event of the Atlantic slave trade. To be clear, the North African Church Fathers were not “black.” Indeed, these men were indigenous people of the African continent. Because of their indebtedness to Greek and Latin philosophy, all of the teachings of the Church Fathers are not applicable. Their witness can be celebrated as fellow pilgrims on the journey of faith and as spiritual ancestors who “earnestly contended for the faith that was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).⁸

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church emerged as the second largest black denomination post-Civil War. Due to its independence, the AME Church had always been viewed with suspicion in the antebellum South, having been forced out of

⁷ Jason O. Evans, “The Fathers of Our Fathers: Reclaiming the (North African) Church Fathers,” Urban Faith, last modified February 13, 2014, accessed November 23, 2014, <http://www.urbanfaith.com/2014/02/the-faith-of-our-fathers-reclaiming-the-north-african-church-fathers.html/>.

⁸ William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983). 84

South Carolina following the Denmark vs. Conspiracy of 1822. The church was reorganized in South Carolina in 1865 by Bishop Daniel Payne and grew to forty-four thousand members by 1877. Other denominations completed the spectrum of black church organization in the South. The Colored Methodist Episcopal (now Christian Methodist Episcopal) Church, which grew from the black parishioners who withdrew in 1866 from predominately white Methodist Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, each claimed two hundred thousand members by 1880.⁹

The more involved black churches became in sparring against the racial intolerance and violence targeted against them, the more the churches and their members were punished. Within the church, the Presbyterians and Episcopalian also saw the division of their memberships into white and black denominations, which each of the two black churches having one hundred thousand members by 1900.¹⁰

Between World War I and World War II, the black church continued not only an arena of social and political life for the leaders of blacks but also had a political meaning for the masses. Although blacks were denied the right to vote in the American community, within their churches, especially the Methodist Churches, they could vote and engage in electing their officers. The election of bishops and other officers and representatives to conventions has been a serious activity for the masses of blacks. The black church was an organizational site for social and political activities, centers for economic development and growth. As a microcosms of the larger society, black churches provided an environment free of oppression and racism for African Americans.

⁹ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 107

¹⁰ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 111.

In black churches, African Americans were consistently exposed to social, political, and economic opportunities, which could be sought and had by all members equally. The representational structure of African American churches confirmed black preachers as both religious and community leaders. The sermons of many black preachers expounded messages of Christianity analogized to the daily experiences of African Americans. Thematic expressions of overcoming oppression and “lifting while climbing” were first articulated in church sermons.¹¹

The Black Church in the Civil Rights Era

During the Civil Rights era, black churches were well-established social and political power bases for African Americans. Their enormous presence sanctioned them with the political power to lead Black people in the movement for civil rights. Some churches and their organizations were completely opposed to any involvement in the political struggle for civil rights. Others chose to participate and did so passionately, organizing by rallies, protests, and marches, while teaching Christianity and community involvement.¹²

The leadership role of black churches during the Civil Rights era was an extension of their structure and function. The black churches offered members an opportunity to exercise roles denied to them in society. Throughout history, the black church served not only as a place of worship but also as a community “bulletin board”

¹¹ McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, 43.

¹² African American Registry, “‘The Black Church,’ A Brief History,” accessed November 24, 2014, www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-church-brief-history.

and “people’s court” to solve disputes, as well as hosting support groups and a center of political activism.

In the late 1940’s, 50’s, and 60’s, the black church functioned as the institutional center for black mobilization. They provided an organizational base and meeting place for African Americans to strategize their moves in the ongoing fight against racial segregation and oppression. As black churches became the epicenter of the social and political struggles for black equality, they increasingly became targets for racially motivated violence. An extensive assault on members of a black community took place by burning a black church.¹³

The bombing and burning of black churches during this time translated into an attack upon the core of civil rights activism, as well as upon the larger black religious community. The most infamous example of racist American church destruction occurred on September 15, 1963. When the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was fire bombed, the explosion rocked the entire black community at its core. Four little girls were killed in the attack, several others injured, and a community’s sense of security within their church was forever traumatized.¹⁴

This act signified the depths of racial hatred. Like many other churches bombed before and after, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a black church. Even though the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was implicated in this crime, members of the KKK were not the only ones responsible for similar acts of terror throughout the country. Unfortunately, this

¹³ African American Registry, “‘The Black Church,’ A Brief History,” accessed November 24, 2014, www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-church-brief-history.

¹⁴ African American Registry, “‘The Black Church,’ A Brief History,” accessed November 24, 2014, www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-church-brief-history.

was not an isolated incident. These racially motivated arsons did not destroy the souls of Black communities.¹⁵

Early Distinct Qualities of the Black Church

The 1990 book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* by Lawrence H. Mamiya and C. Eric Lincoln, described the seven major historic black denominations as: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church; the National Baptist Convention, USA Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), as comprising “The Black Church.”¹⁶

These seven major historic black denominations rested their morals on preaching and teaching the Gospel; and as a result, parishioners would be actively engaged in ministry. Many pastors believed the best way to get men into the church and keep them and current male members active is to preach the true Gospel and all the parts of it that can make people uncomfortable. When men and women hear God’s truth, they are motivated to work for God’s glory, and they are convicted by their sin. When people feel true conviction and want to repent, they become stronger Christians. They, in turn, want to work harder for God. It is understood that good deeds do not offer salvation and will

¹⁵ African American Registry, “‘The Black Church,’ A Brief History,” accessed November 24, 2014, www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/black-church-brief-history.

¹⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lincoln H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 298.

not get anyone into Heaven, but a Christian looking to grow in his or her faith will look into ways to advance the Kingdom.

When pastors preach a watered-down Gospel, the results will be watered-down Christian men who will not stand up for the faith and most likely will leave the church once things get difficult. The church is a place for worship, fellowship, learning and loving. It can be a fun place, but that is not required to be a sound church based on biblical truth. It is great to offer fun activities and events, but everything a church does must be based on the Gospel. When more churches preach the true Gospel, there will be more men in the pews and those men will become more involved.

Principles for a Male Friendly Church

There are some basic principles that will help develop a male-friendly church. The environment developed is more important than the events or programs. A man is looking for an environment that is consistent with who he is as a man and a place where he feels comfortable and belongs. The church should be an environment that nurtures a man into becoming the predestined man that God has designed. These principles men are looking for and want are: relevance, a cause greater than themselves, a shot of greatness, challenges, action, leaders and want to be leaders, fun, brothers, and healing.¹⁷ There are over 450,000 churches in the United States. Yet, fidelity, vibrancy, and reproduction would not characterize many of them. Instead, every year between 3,500 to 4,000 are

¹⁷ Steve Sonderman, *How to Build a Life-Changing Men's Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 24.

closing their doors for good.¹⁸ That means last Sunday alone was the final time seventy churches met to worship.

Many of those churches realize, after reflecting, they were missing a love for scriptures, qualified leadership, transparent relationships, and a lack of zeal for the gospel demonstrated by their lack of personal evangelism. What characterized many of these dying churches instead was a historic-preservation mindset, petty factionalism, and spiritual apathy. These dangerous ingredients are still seen in churches today, all of which combined creates a dangerous outcome for a soon-to-be extinct church. Nothing less than a full renovation is needed to bring back a vibrant gospel witness that many of these churches used to have.

Pastors can easily identify the problems that characterize many of their dead or dying church populations, but they are less confident in their understanding and ability of what to do about it. The default instincts for many are to address a change of policies, programs or personnel. While those are areas that likely need to be addressed in time, they will not provide the substance needed for a reformation in the local church.

The Church Under Reconstruction: Some Templates

Tim Chester and Steven Timmis' work, *Total Church: A Radical Shaping Around Gospel and Community*, is a helpful contribution and published in response to the heightened interest of church planting in recent years.¹⁹ Many young men are interested

¹⁸ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 10.

¹⁹ Tim Chester and Steven Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 16.

in church planting as a reaction to what they have not seen in their current local churches. Yet many of them still cannot tell you what their new communities of faith should look like. This book is a valuable resource to read in order to audit how a church should be described and the goal setting process. It is helpful for the purpose of church revitalization as well as because churches should be described by the same basic theological commitments.

The need for revitalization is not unique today. Robert D. Dale shows in *To Dream Again* that churches need to examine themselves honestly to find out where they are in the health of their church.²⁰ Dale's work still has relevancy to today's situation with local churches. Dale establishes the life cycle of a local church: dreams, goals, structure, ministry, nostalgia, questioning, polarization, and dropout. Dale continues by discussion what a church can do to get back to what it was first excited about. He believes that churches lose their purpose and then eventually move from distraction to disintegration, which can be remedied by planning and promoting accordingly.

The need for revitalization is also not unique to evangelical churches. C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen's work, *Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream*, addresses the issue that mainline protestant denominations have had for years, namely maintaining people in their churches. While evangelicals have theological explanations for this exodus, the mainline protestant leadership has provided other answers.²¹

²⁰ Robert D. Dale, *To Dream Again: How to Help Your Church Come Alive* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1981), 74.

²¹ C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen, *Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream: Sources of Growth and Opportunities for Change* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 67.

Mike McKinley, pastor of Sterling Park Baptist Church, highlights some concerns about church retention in *Church Planting is for Wimpy: How God Uses Messed-up People to Plant Ordinary Churches that do Extraordinary Things*. He argues that it is helpful to understand that professionalism does not win the day when it comes to leading churches, whether that is planting or revitalizing. McKinley seems familiar with the challenges that face many pastors when going through such difficult transitional times. This work is witty, wise, and easy to read as a primer to the topic. It is helpful as a resource as McKinley highlights the role of exposition, evangelism, and godly leadership over and against growing a larger church.²²

Harry L. Reeder III's contribution to the subject of church renewal is helpful since he writes not as an academic theoretician, though he has taught in seminaries, but as one who has worked out his lessons in local church contexts. Writing with David Swavely, Reeder wrote *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* and presents ten strategies for revitalization.²³ These can be further summarized by three major principles to be implemented: remember, repent, and recover. There is a way to recognize a church's past faithfulness without wanting to repeat its mistakes. If there has been wrongdoing or missing marks of faithful ministry, repentance should be offered for this. Also, the gospel in all of its implications must be recovered for a vibrant future of ministry.

²² Mike McKinley and Darrin Patrick, *Church Planting Is for Wimpy: How God Uses Messed-up People to Plant Ordinary Churches that do Extraordinary Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). 29.

²³ Harry L. Reeder III and David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008).27.

Another practitioner who offers helpful insight is Michael Ross. Ross' work, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church Through Your Pulpit*, devotes itself entirely to the task of preaching for purpose of revitalization.²⁴ While demographics, contextualization, and communication are often emphasized in revitalization of local churches, Ross thankfully reminds today's interested pastors that nothing can happen (at least of any lasting significance) without first bringing change to the pulpit. Ross demonstrates how the pulpit sets a trajectory by which the rest of the church life will follow. His counsel is pastorally informed as he gives the reader ideas on how to prepare the pulpit calendar with an eye to changing the church culture over the coming years.

Historical perspective can be helpful when asking, "Has this happened before? If so, what did they do about it?" This is exactly what Lyle Schaller presents in his work *A Mainline Turnaround: Strategies for Congregations and Denominations*. Shaller's contention is that churches were not designed for something that they are now encountering and therefore are failing.²⁵ His proposed remedy includes churches reinventing themselves, redesigning their ministries, and redirecting their efforts to those born after 1960. While his intended audience is mainline denominations, his work is helpful for the purpose of diagnostics.²⁶ Churches need to discern how they have maintained the same methodology to acquire the same results though their audience has

²⁴ Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church Through Your Pulpit* (Glasgow, UK: Mentor, 2006), 12

²⁵ Lyle E. Shaller, *A Mainline Turnaround: Strategies for Congregations and Denominations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 58.

²⁶ Shaller, *A Mainline Turnaround*, 59-60.

changed. His solutions will stretch the boundaries of evangelical comfort because of his implicit view of the Word of God and the definition of Church.

During the Civil Rights era, African American males between the ages of twenty-one and forty faced a very different social landscape and served a very different type of community. Segregation limited black people's options of where they could congregate, celebrate or even carry out business; the church was a central part of the community's survival. The church's significance has shifted as African American males have gained access to services and opportunities they were denied before. For African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty, church is a choice, when in the past, it was the only option we had left. We are more aware of the need to "by any means necessary" retain the male population in all facets of Christendom. We will continue to strain ahead with vigor, passion, and love to show that all hope is not lost.

Conclusion

Why is there a decline in young black male participation in the life of the church? This question is one in which there is no clear answer. There are no definitive studies that offer reasons why and solutions. Some white critic of Colin Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the National Anthem commented that his purpose, which he wants addressed is indiscriminate police killings of black males, offers no solutions. This is an awkward analogy. This sport's reporter, or should I say commentator, has a constitutional right, not to mention that he is also being paid, to critique the protest of black athletes in not standing for the National Anthem. In his whiteness, which comes with built in privileges, and blindness to what blacks face in America, this writer can smugly critique this football

player. This is what he sees him as: a football player and not a man. This reporter can drive home from a game and be pulled over by the police without having to go through an existential moment as to if this “stop” may lead to being killed because the officer thought that he was a threat simply because of his skin color. It seems as if it is easier to critique a protest than address the issue. What the reported left out in the larger story is that Kaepernick mentors youth and has announced that he is donating one million dollars to organizations that deal with problems of the threat of being black in America. Again, the issue is the decline of black males’ attendance and participation in the life of the church. What are the reasons? Is there a timeline chronicling this exodus? What are some of the solutions to this concern.? Several areas, I believe, played a role in this exodus: the Civil and Voting Rights Bills of 1964 and 1965, the rise of the Nation of Islam, mass incarceration and the decline of black leadership on a large scale.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 seemed to be a watershed moment in the life of African Americans in this country. After years of living as a second class citizens, a new way of existence was unfolding for the masses of blacks in America. The church had been an anchor to black life from emancipation to that present time. With this sense of freedom also came, or so it seemed, an exodus from the church. Though the fear of white oppression had not been lifted as a veil, blacks in America felt some measure of liberation. The church, once a mainstay in attention and activities, was now receding in the background. The irony here is that it was the prophetic activisms of the church with its marches and protests that played a role in this federal legislation.

Another contributing factor in the decline of black males' participation in the church was the emergence the Nation of Islam and its attractiveness to young black males. Wherein the black church had programs, learning centers, scouting, recreational activities and more, something was lacking: teaching boys how to become men. Hence, in the new found freedom to attend events and activities once closed to them, black males now had a measure of freedom to explore. Much of this exploration took place with few "self" restraints. The church, it could be argued, having made strides in areas of human (civil) rights, now turned its attention to denominational and judicatory events. This is not to say that the church had lost its prophetic voice altogether. But something attractive was being offered to males. That offering was a blend of self-discipline, black aspiration and community building offered by the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X, born and reared as Malcolm Little, was the son of a Baptist minister. His family house was burned and his father was murder by members of the Ku Klux Klan. Malcolm developed a mistrust for whites and the church. Elijah Muhammed taught that the church was the white man's religion and that Islam was the true religion of blacks. The attractiveness of the Nation of Islam was not only to Malcolm but also many other young black males.

The absence of young black males in the church can also be viewed through the lens of the criminal justice system. Today it is estimated that one in four black males are either in jail, prison or probation or somehow connected to the criminal justice system. There is, some would say, a pipe line from school to prison. This is especially true for young black males in public school. Many black male students are placed on a criminal track for minor infractions while their white counterparts are given lesser punishment, if any. Again, the church seems to be impotent in this matter. Many ministers are present at

school board meetings and advocating for the right things for black children. Many churches have tutorial programs to help students with their work. Yet, something is absent when it comes to helping young black children, males in particular, in how to handle stressful situations and navigate the political, and often racist, bureaucracy of the school system. Black males, subsequently, fall by the wayside in seeing any relevance of the church in their existential situation.

Lastly, there is a void in black leadership in caring for young black males. Great strides have been made in the uplift of the race since emancipation. African Americans have been a part of what can be considered the middle class for years. Over the past fifty years, black men and women have made it into the upper regions of the upper class. Black have been elected to governor's office, both houses of Congress, the presidency, CEO's of Fortune 500 companies, and presidents of Ivy League Schools. Blacks are astronauts, scientists, engineers as well as singers, musicians, actors, directors and producers. Yet, much of consciousness of the black community and the black church has been lost when it comes to the leadership of the church. Even before Emancipation, blacks were involved in activities toward the uplift of the race. Much of this is lost today.

In his book *Race Matters*, Cornell West asserts,

Black political leadership reveals the tame and genteel face of the black middle class. The black dress suits with white shirts worn by Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr., signified the seriousness of their deep commitment to black freedom, whereas today the expensive tailored suits of black politicians symbolize their personal success and individual achievement. Malcolm and Martin called for the realization that black people are somebodies with which America has to reckon, whereas black politician tend to turn our attention to *their* somebodiesness owing to *their* 'making it' in America.²⁷

²⁷ Cornell West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 37-38.

And so it seems that the middle class blacks who were once strong leaders in their local communities have now turned their attention elsewhere. Young black males, sadly, have been ignored to a great extent in all of this. There is a parallel for the black leadership of the church as is for political elected persons. In years past, especially before and during the Civil Rights era, ministry was viewed and acted on as a vocation. Today, it is viewed, by many but not all, as a profession with all the trappings that this entails. So many pastors are leaders in religious circles where they travel, speak, network and make sizable sums of money while little takes place in the area of ministry where they serve. In this regard, it has been noted by some that the only young black males present in church and especially at worship are the pastors, the musicians and the custodian. Young black males are not a priority in the discipleship ministry of the church, that is if they have one, or the church's work of evangelism.

In short, there are many reasons that young black males are absent from the life of the church. These several areas mentioned are some of the more notable. The work of outreach to this demographic of young black males is needful in all communities. This work involves faithfulness and the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ died for these persons too. And when the outreach of Christ's love is shared with them, it behooves the church to consider new wine skins in sharing this gospel. People of faith must not come off as superior in their being but as sinners who are reaching out to other sinners to share the love of God in Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

When evaluating the rapid dropout rate of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty, the reasons that they choose to dropout or leave church varies. Many theologians have conducted research to gain a better understanding of these various reasons. The research and the statistical data are critically important when attempting to identify or establish a remedy to alleviate the mass exodus. In addition to evaluating the findings of the various researchers, it is also critically important to evaluate the theological perspective as to why African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty are no longer interested, engaged or actively participating in the church in this postmodern culture. African American males are struggling to practice faith and are interested in what God has done and can do to help them with their particular concerns and problems. Some of the problems are related to sickness, hunger, death, family, housing, crime, and education.

Theological ethicist Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher makes this point forcefully in *Xodus: An African American Male Journey*.

I contend that the fate of the ‘new male’ movement championed by Robert Bly, Robert Moore, Douglass Gillette, Sam Keen, and others rests in its willingness to include as many diverse and powerless voices as possible. It will never be able to construct a ‘new male’ without the creative voices of excluded men and women

as part of that constructive conversation. The genuine ‘new male’ will need to be shaped by the perspectives, criticisms, pain, and joy that African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and poor Euro American men can contribute.¹

When considering the ‘new male,’ many will argue that the act or art of preaching no longer reaches these generations due to the highly technological savvy world in which they are accustomed. Others will argue that the millennials would prefer to receive their weekly dose of worship by logging on to their favorite streaming site. Regardless of the reason or rationale, the loss of young adult male presence within the church is aggressively declining. In finding the remedy, there needs to be a compilation of the research previously conducted by researchers as well as theologians. Perhaps through the compilation of research, clergy will find the answer to retaining those that have made the mass exodus.

In order to be effect in retention, the black church must seriously consider the plight of the African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. Issues of consider are: how do African American men understand themselves, how they view the world, how they behave, and how they feel about their experiences as African American men in America. Additionally, in order to be effective in reaching them, the black church must resist the temptation to view African American masculinity from a monolithic standard, one generally replete with negative images and destructive representations.² Most importantly, the black church must be a moral incubator which aids in the reconstruction of African American masculinity.

¹ Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus: An African American Male Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 22.

² Haki R. Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1990), 59-121.

The relative paucity of African American males, especially between the ages of 21-40, in the black church represents a serious threat to the stability and sustainability of the church. Robert M. Franklin calls it the “crisis of institutional participation.”³ Franklin’s warning, too extends this crisis to all institutions requisite to the well-being of African American people. Franklin’s admonition represents a stern challenge to African American church ministry. He states:

Considering evidence showing high unemployment and school dropout rates, and comparatively low church attendance rates for black males, we can postulate a crisis of male participation in institutions responsible historically for socializing members of the community. There appears to be at least a four fold disengagement from institutional commitments to school, work, family, and church.⁴

James Cone is quoted as saying in *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*,

I still am not convinced that the major black denominational churches are ready for renewal, but I do believe that there are still many genuinely committed black pastors and lay persons who transcend the limitations of their denominational identity by becoming identified with Christ through a commitment to the poor. They are found in all denominations (black as well as white) and they seem determined to build more humane church structures that serve the community. They are feeding the hungry, holding workshops on economics and politics as well as black church history and theology, building alternative schools for black children, and working at many other creative projects of freedom. These pastors and members refuse to withdraw from the world by engaging in internal church politics. They are concrete examples that the black church is not an opiate of the people, but rather a liberating force in behalf of the victims of the land.⁵

³ Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day’s Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 89.

⁴ Franklin, *Another Day’s Journey*, 89.

⁵ James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 114.

Many critical issues facing the African-American community such as sexism, AIDS, single parent homes, sexual morality, blended families, drugs, gun violence, teenage mothers, teenage mothers, infant mortality, and Black males as missing in the churches and homes, require that the members of communities not seek easy answers to problems but work hard to determine what the Word of God has to say specifically to us in this particular place and at this particular time. Black theologians should consider it a priority to give priority to the task of effecting a workable partnership with the black churches in order to address social problems that plague black communities. James Cone, in *A Black Theology of Liberation* quoted that “God’s humanity is far more analogous to Black flesh than to White flesh because Black flesh “is the only symbol that cannot be overlooked if we ...take Jesus Christ’s Christological significance.”⁶

There are numerous books and articles that address the reasons that young adults, especially African American males are dropping out of church. According to LifeWay research, forty-five specific reasons have been provided for the dropout rate among young adults.⁷ Those reasons have been grouped into three major categories. The first category can be identified as “life changes or situations.” Nineteen of the reasons given fall into this category with 97% of all church dropouts indicating some change or circumstance that occurred within their life that was a contributing factor to their decision to stop attending church on a regular basis.⁸ In some cases, the circumstances prevented them from attending church even though they still maintained a desire to attend. Most

⁶ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 123.

⁷ David Rudd, *Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Research, 2007), 1.

⁸ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 5.

books and articles fail to address this major contributing factor to young adults leaving the church.

Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer address this category in their book *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. Their research explores the top ten life changes that contributed to young adults dropping out of church. The top reason was they “simply wanted a break from church.” This was the number one reason given for disengagement among all three categories with 27% of young adults. Second, they moved away to college. Third, they experienced a change in work responsibilities. Fourth, they moved too far away from the church. Fifth, their schedule became too busy, even though they desired to attend. Next, they began to spend more time with unchurched friends. Seventh, schoolwork prevented them from attending. Eight, they desired to make life decisions that were not accepted by the church. Ninth, responsibilities at home prevented them from attending. Finally, they no longer stayed in touch with their churchgoing friends.⁹ The remaining nine reasons included: scheduling conflicts, guilt over lifestyle, got married, friends do not attend, parents divorced, friends stopped attending, family moved to far away, parents did not expect attendance, and sport activities conflicted with church attendance.¹⁰

Change is a natural occurrence within life. As discovered in Rainer’s research, it often serves as the catalyst for disengagement from a local church. While most dropouts have identified these factors as a major contributing factor, little is written to address how

⁹ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2008), 73.

¹⁰ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 13.

to handle these changes within the local church. Rainer suggests that these reasons sound mundane, but they are none-the-less a major contributing factor in young adult disengagement.¹¹

The second major category of the reasons given for young adults leaving the church is “church or pastor related.” While two of the fourteen reasons that compose this category deal with programs, worship style, most of the reasons provided are relational in nature. Fifty-eight percent of church dropouts identified one of the fourteen reasons within this category as a specific reason for disengagement.¹² The number one reason within this category according to LifeWay’s research is the perception that church members were judgmental or hypocritical. This was the number one reason within this category and the second highest reason among all three categories with 26% of young adults giving this reason as a contributing factor. Second, young adults did not feel connected to others who attended the church. Third, church members were perceived as unfriendly, unwelcoming, and even cliquish. Fourth, the pastor’s sermons were not engaging. Fifth, young adults felt the church was not helping them develop spiritually. Sixth, young adults left the church when their pastor left the church. Next, young adults left the church because they did not have programs for them. Eighth, young adults felt that church members were vastly different from themselves. Ninth, young adults felt the worship style was unappealing. Finally, young adults left if they believed the pastor was not a good preacher.¹³ The remaining reasons provided included: did not feel involved in

¹¹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 73.

¹² Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 11.

¹³ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

meaningful work in the church, sermons were not relevant, too many expectations, and the youth minister left the church.¹⁴

Rainer's research suggests that young adults are searching for meaningful relationships among church members and the church staff. Mark DeVries in *Sustainable Youth Ministry* writes, "In a survey of ten thousand Christian teenagers, kids rated only two qualities of church more important than "a senior pastor who understands and loves teenagers."¹⁵ This statement suggests that the senior pastor has a great influence upon their choice of church and their involvement. With the perception among young adults that church members are judgmental or hypocritical, there are many books that help the youth worker understand how to build healthier relationships with those who feel judged, disconnected, unwelcome, or simply different. Les Christie, in *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students* addresses many of the relational challenges that occur during adolescence and how youth workers can develop healthy relationships that mature them into spiritually healthy young adults within the church.¹⁶

According to LifeWay Research, the third major category that classifies the reasons for young adult disengagement is "religious, ethical, or political reasons."¹⁷ Fifty-two percent of church dropouts gave one of the reasons within this category as a

¹⁴ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 15.

¹⁵ Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 12.

¹⁶ Les John Christie, *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2008), 21.

¹⁷ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 11.

contributing factor toward their disengagement.¹⁸ While the first two categories provide room for adjustment on the part of church leadership, the final major category is one that has little to no room for compromise. The number one reason within this category is that a young adult disagreed with the church's official stance on particular political or social issues. While this is the number one reason within this category, it ranks eighth among all categories with 18% of young adults.¹⁹ Second, young adults left because they were previously attending just to please others. Third, young adults no longer wished to be identified with the church or organized religion. Fourth, they disagreed with the church's moral and ethical guidelines for daily living. Fifth, they faced a challenge in life that resulted in the young adult questioning their faith. Sixth, they disagreed with what the church teaches about God. Seventh, attending church was merely a habit. Next, young adults left the church because they were unsure of the reasons behind their faith. Ninth, young adults left the church because they no longer wanted to be identified as a Christian. Finally, young adults left the church because they did not agree with that particular denomination. The remaining reasons given among young adults for leaving the church were becoming angry with God for personal reasons and they stopped believing in God.²⁰

Religious, ethical, and political reasons for leaving the church are undoubtedly important issues, but they certainly ranked lower than most other reasons. However, these reasons are the subject of most books and articles concerning young adult dropouts. Some have suggested that youth ministry is to blame and should be eradicated from the

¹⁸ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 11.

¹⁹ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 11.

²⁰ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 17.

church, while others suggested their need for stronger apologetics within children and youth ministries.²¹ These three major categories are critical to understanding not only the reasons young adults are leaving the church, but also crucial in developing a strategy for retention.

Life Changes or Situations

There are a number of books that are dealing with the need for change within the modern church suggesting that leaders must be rethinking, reinventing, or reimagining church. While change within the church may be necessary, there already exist external changes that are influencing young adults to leave the church. The church must be prepared not only to push for change that improves their existing ministries, but Rainer suggests that churches must develop “ministries to accommodate for the change that the people of the church experience from their daily lives.”²²

As stated earlier, the first reason for young adults leaving the church is they simply wanted to take a break from church (27%).²³ As young adults become busier in their schedules, they simply had no room for attending church. Church was viewed as an activity on the weekly to-do list that took up time on their already overbooked calendar. Young adults may not view church as necessary for a relationship with Christ. However, the two are inseparable. Christ is the groom and married to His bride, the church. A Christian that is not involved in church is like attempting a marriage without the spouse.

²¹ Ken Ham, C. Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop it* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 46.

²² Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 74.

²³ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 12.

Rainer writes, “It should be harder to leave a church than to join a church.”²⁴ His point is clear most churches are extremely excited and celebratory when new people join the church. However, people can leave the church and no one seems to notice as church programs continue to operate as usual. Regardless of the life occurrence that is blamed for the leaving, there may be unspoken reasons for young adults departing the church.²⁵

The second reason for young adults leaving the church within the category of life changes is because they moved away to college (25%).²⁶ Many churches do not have ministries developed for college-age students. The primary reason given for this is because a large number of those churches are not located within college towns. However, 10% of the United States population is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.²⁷ Lack of college-age young adults within the community is not a problem. In fact, Rainer’s research demonstrates no significant difference between the dropout rates of college students (69%) and those who did not attend college (71%).²⁸ This statistic seems to suggest that universities are not the cause of students leaving the church. The Barna Research Group has confirmed similar findings. David Kinnaman of the Barna Group writes, “the university setting does not usually cause the disconnect; it

²⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 76.

²⁵ Gordon Atkinson, “Parting Shots: When Church Members Leave,” *The Christian Century*, last modified September 2009, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2009-09/parting-shots>.

²⁶ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 12.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, “Age and Sex: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” American FactFinder, accessed February 16, 2015, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_S0101&prodType=table.

²⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 88.

exposes the shallow-faith problem of many young disciples.”²⁹ Perhaps it is the church that must take responsibility that many of these formerly church-attending young adults have difficulty transitioning out of youth ministry and into the adult population of the church body. Rainer condemningly writes, “The myth of the university is broken; colleges are not responsible for church dropouts. The church is responsible for church dropouts.”³⁰ Kinnaman explains that college certainly contributes to the development of a young Christian’s spiritual journey, but the educational experiences of the classroom are not the primary cause for young adults disengagement from the local church.³¹ It is clear that most young adults have difficulty identifying with those in differing life stages and potentially leave the church.³² It is important to note that 80% of young adults who dropped out of church had no intentions of leaving until they reached the young adult life stage.³³ Once they became a young adult, they no longer viewed church as a meaningful and necessary part of their spiritual growth. Therefore, when life presented changes, they adjusted their schedule and church was the first to go. Young adults who understood the importance of church within the process of their spiritual growth were more likely to remain involved in church. Scott McConnell writes, “The two most frequent reasons young people stay in church relate to the relevance of church: ‘Church was a vital part of

²⁹ David Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropout,” Barna Research, last modified November 2011, accessed February 16, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>.

³⁰ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 89.

³¹ David Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts,” Barna Group, November 15, 2011, accessed February 16, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/millennials/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>.

³² Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 81.

³³ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 83.

relationship with God' (65%) and 'I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life' (58%)."³⁴ Deepening the understanding and importance of church involvement improves the likelihood of retention. However, Rainer makes it clear that "activity is not the same as being active."³⁵ He explains that activities can be attractive to the unchurched and bring them to the church, but they are not sufficient to assimilate the unchurched into the body. Young adults who are simply attending activities within the church without recognizing the personal value in their spiritual maturity are more likely to disengage. It does not matter whether it is worship services, Bible studies, youth events, or any other church activity, if the church is not valued, it will be removed from the calendar when life change or circumstances occur.

The third reason given for young adults leaving the church within the life change category is the demands of work prevent the ability to attend church (23%).³⁶ Logically, many young adults have two major choices upon high school graduation. They either enter the work force or begin college or military. Therefore, it is only natural that the primary reasons for leaving the church are work responsibilities and or moving away to college or the military. This would be especially true for those who are working and attending college at the same time. Whether college, military, work, family, friends, marriage, or sports are the contributing factor in the decision to leave the church, the ultimate choice is a matter of priority for the individual. As stated earlier, when young adults understand the value of church involvement to their personal spiritual growth, they

³⁴ Scott McConnell, "LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay, August 7, 2007, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

³⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 84.

³⁶ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 12.

are more likely to remain involved. McConnell writes, “Half of those who stayed in church recognize benefits and say, I felt that church was helping me become a better person.”³⁷ There is a major difference in the attitudes of those who stated they “wanted a break” or “work responsibilities were too great to remain involved” and those who declared, “church was vital to Christian walk.” McConnell states, “The vitality and everyday relevance these young people experienced in church is a stark contrast to church dropouts who wanted a break from church and felt unconnected.”³⁸

Dropping out of church due to life change or circumstances is a fairly recent phenomenon. Evidence suggests that the Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) were the first American generation to drop out of church in large numbers once they became young adults.³⁹ Ed Stetzer commented on the priorities of young adults and church, “When life changes, reshuffle priorities and time in young adults’ lives, church doesn’t make it back on that list for a lot of them and I think that maybe tells us where we’ve prioritized those things.”⁴⁰ Unless there is a change in how the individual perceives the value of church, life change and circumstances can create a cycle of church involvement. The life change of marriage may cause them to leave the church, while the

³⁷ Scott McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” LifeWay, August 7, 2007, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

³⁸ McConnell, “LifeWay Research,” LifeWay, August 7, 2007, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church>.

³⁹ David Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts,” Barna Group, November 15, 2011, accessed February 16, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/millennials/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>.

⁴⁰ Audrey Barrick, “Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church,” *The Christian Post* (August 2007), accessed February 19, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-reasons-why-young-adutls-quit-church-28813/>.

life change of having children can bring them back. Yet another life changing circumstance may result in their disengagement again. Because life is filled with changing circumstances, the cycle of church involvement can be unending.⁴¹

Pastor or Church Related Issues

This section will address the six reasons closely related to the pastor and church membership for the decline of young adults in the church. The first reason for young adults leaving the church is because the sermons did not capture the attention of the young adult (14%).⁴² There are many questions surrounding this particular reason for leaving the church. It is possible that young adults associated this answer with boredom. Jeff Schapiro states that according to research from the Barna Group, one-third of the young adults surveyed felt that “church is boring.”⁴³ Matthew Green expands on the problem of boredom and addresses additional problems:

All across the United States today, believers who once attended church regularly are in the dropout category. Some quit because they were wounded by leaders or disappointed by pastoral failure. Others became bored with irrelevant church programs or petty squabbles. Others simply felt relationally disconnected, even though they sat behind the same people week after week.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 90.

⁴² Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

⁴³ Jeff Schapiro, “Study: Why Young Christians Leave the Church,” *The Christian Post*, last modified September 28, 2011, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/study-why-young-christians-leave-the-church-56722>.

⁴⁴ Matthew Green, “Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?” *Charisma Magazine*, last modified December 19, 2012, February 19, 2015, <http://www.charismamag.com/spirit/church-ministry/7279-the-church-dropout>.

It appears that the boredom of young adults is not limited to the pastor's sermons, but entire programs. Perhaps they believed the pastor's sermons were not relevant to their stage in life. Another possibility is that young adults may expect the sermon to have a certain quality of entertainment value. Regardless, the sermon did not connect with the young adult on a personal level. The details of this particular reason could be as varied as the individual pastors who delivered the messages.

The second reason for young adults leaving the church is because the church was not helping the young adult develop in spiritual maturity (13%).⁴⁵ It is possible that even though this particular reason was only selected thirteen percent of the time, that many more were not being developed into spiritual growth. Scripture provides a clear expectation that every member of the church body is to contribute to the discipleship process of another believer.

Two passages help identify the characteristics of the disciple making process, they are Ephesians 4:11-16 and Colossians 1:28. Ephesians 4:11-12 states, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Within this discipleship process God has called some to equip others in the body of Christ for the work of ministry. This ministry is the same ministry as discovered throughout scripture, to spread the Gospel and in so doing fulfill the Great Commission. There is to be a unity of mind within the church concerning ministry and mission. The passage continues in verse sixteen, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by

⁴⁵ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” While some have been called to equip the members of the body, every member of the body has a role in the discipleship process. When each part of the body is doing their part, then the church begins to experience numerical growth. Once again, Ephesians the fourth chapter identifies love as the motivation for each individual to serve within their role in the body. Likewise, Colossians 1:28 states, “Him we preach, warning *every* man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” This verse emphasizes the importance of “every” individual in the church. Motivated by love, every person within the body of Christ works together in the discipleship process. If a church is following the New Testament model for making disciples, there is no reason for any person to leave the church because the church was not helping them mature in their faith.

The third reason for young adults leaving the church is because a well-liked pastor left the church (13%).⁴⁶ While it is true that people connect to other people and not programs, it is also important that the connection not be limited to a single personality within the church. The relational aspect for young adult involvement is crucial. Trouble begins when the young adult has no other connections except for the senior pastor. While church growth should not be centered on the senior pastor’s personality that is not to say the senior pastor is not essential in the retention of young adults. Senior pastors must champion ministry to young people. The senior pastor is positioned to assist the church

⁴⁶ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

membership in understanding the importance of a healthy student ministry that is preparing them for young adult life as a maturing follower of Christ.⁴⁷

Scandal among church leaders was not listed among the reasons within LifeWay's research for young adults leaving the church. However, it is worthy to note that various authors have identified some type of abuse as a contributing factor for young adults leaving the church. Drew Dyck suggests that some young adults are recoiling because of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse within the church.⁴⁸ It is difficult for children to make a distinction between God and their abusers. As young adults, they may associate those painful experiences with God and as a result experience challenges with their faith.⁴⁹ While verbal, physical, or sexual abuse are damaging to those involved, there are also scandals that are damaging to institutional churches. John Garvey suggests that the church can no longer blame secular influences for young adults leaving the church, but must take responsibility for the scandals that have occurred and not hide them from the public. Garvey suggests that some individuals seem more concerned with hiding a scandal and less concerned for the victims of said scandal.⁵⁰ When this type of abuse is swept under a rug in hopes of protecting the church's reputation, more damage is being created. This is not the example of Jesus, who exposed sin and came to the defense of those who were abused by the religious leaders of His day.

⁴⁷ DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 13.

⁴⁸ Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith...and How to Bring Them Back* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 58.

⁴⁹ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 59.

⁵⁰ John Garvey, "Why People Leave the Church: Don't Blame the Zeitgeist," *Commonweal Magazine* (April 2, 2007), accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/why-people-leave-church-0>.

The fourth reason for young adults leaving the church is that church members give the perception of being judgmental or even hypocritical (26%).⁵¹ Kinnaman and the Barna Group agree that many young people leave the church because they view church members as judgmental. Kinnaman identifies those young adults in three categories: nomads, exiles, and prodigals. The nomads are leaving traditional religious institutions but their spiritual journey is still a high priority. The exiles are hopeful within the belief system, but have difficulty remaining involved when life changes occur. The prodigals are those who are leaving and abandoning the faith.⁵² What Kinnaman has identified as the exiles was largely addressed with those who leave for “life change or situations.” Those who view the church as judgmental are either leaving the church entirely (i.e. prodigals) or have given up on the traditional institutions (i.e. nomads).⁵³ There is a growing number of clergy that are also leaving the traditional institutions searching for a more organic structure to ministry.⁵⁴ Young adults are more interested in doing hands-on missions rather than viewing missions as merely financial support for someone on the other side of the world. Suits and hymns are not the obstacle for young adults, but the lack of joy that should accompany the hymns. There is change of clothes, but not a change of life that conforms to the likeness of Christ. Many young adults view those

⁵¹ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

⁵² Gina E. Ryder, “Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out on Church?” *The Christian Post* (October 11, 2011), accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-dropouts-why-are-young-people-skipping-out-on-church-57853>.

⁵³ Lillian Kwon, “Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church,” *The Christian Post*, last modified February 20, 2007, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/young-people-leaving-hypocrisy-not-traditional-church-25912/>.

⁵⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving the Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

within the church as hypocritical because their worship is lifeless and their mission is outsourced.⁵⁵ Whether the judgmental attitude is actual or perceived, young adults' feelings are a reality. Gina Ryder explains, "For some young people, church expectations and individual sexual experiences collided. One in six Christians said, 'they have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.'"⁵⁶ Some suggest that young adults are viewing hypocrisy not only in the pews of the church, but within their own family. Parents who project a person at church, while living in complete contrast the other days of the week are a consideration as well.⁵⁷

According to scripture, judgment is not the problem but rather how people are judged is the problem. John 7:24 states, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." Judgment is necessary for spiritual maturation. However, judgment that is not matched with grace in a meaningful discipleship relationship does more harm. Proverbs 31:9 proclaim, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." Once again, the qualifier for judgment is righteousness that is obtained by God's grace. As a result, young adults who feel judgment without the demonstration of God's grace will continue to leave the church. The fifth reason for young adults leaving the church is that young adults did not feel connected to others within the church (20%). Kara Powell of the Fuller Youth Institute writes, "As a research team, we weren't all that surprised that of five

⁵⁵ Lillian Kwon, "Young People Leaving Hypocrisy.

⁵⁶ Gina E. Ryder, "Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out on Church?" *The Christian Post* (October 11, 2011), accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-dropouts-why-are-young-people-skipping-out-on-church-57853>.

⁵⁷ Roger L. Dudley and Randall L. Wisbey, "The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults," *Religious Education* 95, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 39-50.

major sources of support (adults in the congregation, parents, youth workers, friends in youth group, and friends outside of youth group), high school seniors ranked adults in the congregation last.⁵⁸ Powell's research indicates that students felt most welcomed and valued when adults within the congregation demonstrated a genuine interest in them. When adults make an attempt to get to know the young people in their own church, they are making a significant impact on making them feel welcome and valued as part of the body of Christ. For this to take place, adults must have opportunity to interact with young people. One of the ways to accomplish this is through providing opportunities for teenagers to serve within the church alongside older adults.⁵⁹

It is important to maintain the sense of connectedness when young adults leave their home church for college. Freshman who are contacted by members of their congregation within the first semester are more encouraged to remain involved in church. Research indicates that college freshman rate finding a local church in their new college town as among the top three challenges they face in leaving for college. Developing new friends and feelings of loneliness were the top two challenges respectively.⁶⁰

The sixth reason for young adults leaving the church is because the church members are not friendly or welcoming to young adults (15%).⁶¹ As stated earlier, the church members may actually be unfriendly or perceived unfriendly. Regardless, many young adults within the church are experiencing feelings of being unwelcome.

⁵⁸ Kara Eckmann Powell, Chap Clark, and Cheryl Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2011), 77.

⁵⁹ Powell, Clark, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 75.

⁶⁰ Powell, Clark, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 78.

⁶¹ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 14.

After breaking bread together Jesus said to His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love for one another,” (John 13:34-35). Jesus understood that one of the greatest testimonies a church can have is how to treat one another. As a disciple of Christ, there is a relational aspect of love for God and His people. Jesus has identified love as the evidence of authenticity. More specifically, love is demonstrated for God’s people. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2: 1-4:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

This type of love for others is accomplished when the body of Christ is united in one mind in ministry and mission. Each believer serves in relation to the rest of the body according to his or her spiritual gifting. The body is healthy when each part, that is each disciple, is properly serving in relation to others in the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12). Unfortunately, there are adults within the church that do not display a Christ-like attitude. Powell suggests that youth workers steer young people into the direction of mature individuals within the church that can be trusted with the “high calling of entering the life of a kind.”⁶² Whether young adults are experiencing feelings of judgment, disconnectedness, or being unwelcome, the responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders

⁶² Powell, Clark, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 90.

of the adults within the church congregation to adjust their own attitudes and actions toward young adults.

Political, Ethical, or Religious Reasons

There were twelve responses to LifeWay's survey that fall into the category of "political, ethical or religious reasons for young adults leaving the church.⁶³ The three top-rated issues within the category address all three areas. The top reason within this category was young adults who disagreed with the church's stance on a political or social issue (18%).⁶⁴ While political positions are important topics, it can easily become an obstacle when attempting to share the gospel or bring someone back to the faith. Drew Dyck cautions,

Leave politics out of your discussions with them (disengaged young adults). Once they come back to the fold and you think being a Christian means standing on a particular issue; that will be sorted out later. But you don't want to demand that they embrace your particular political issue before coming back to the fold.⁶⁵

Tim Elmore, author of *Generation IY* explains that today's teenagers and young adults are experiencing a cultural shift. This cultural shift is effecting how students view social and political issues. This postmodern worldview embraces relativism, pluralism, and cynicism that create tension with a biblical worldview.⁶⁶ Views of sexuality have drastically changed as pornography has become more readily available and sexting (i.e.

⁶³ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 16.

⁶⁴ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 16.

⁶⁵ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 183.

⁶⁶ Tim Elmore, *Generation IY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener Publishers, 2010), 32.

sending nude or sexual photos of oneself to others) has become a growing trend.⁶⁷ The cultural shift is making it growingly difficult for young adults to embrace a biblical worldview concerning social and political subjects.

The second reason for young adults leaving the church within this category is that some young adults were only attending church to please other people (17%).⁶⁸ It is unclear from the research whether this influence was from parents, peers, or some other person of influence. Regardless, attending for the wrong reasons is an ethical problem. However, instead of considering the proper reasons for attending church, young adults resolved the ethical conflict by leaving the local church. Moral compromise is viewed as the appropriate response. When a conflict arises between beliefs and behavior a decision must be made. Young adults who say they believe one thing, yet behave quite differently must resolve by either abandoning their beliefs or changing their actions.⁶⁹

The third reason in this category for young adults leaving the church is that young adults no longer wish to be identified with the church or any form of organized religion (16%).⁷⁰ While they still believe in the importance of spirituality, they believe the church is not necessary in the process. Instead, many have embraced a moralistic approach to their spiritual journey. They believe a good exists and is generally watching over the world he or she created. Furthermore, this god wants people to be good and treat one another in a fair manner. It does not matter if this principle is learned from the Bible or

⁶⁷ Elmore, *Generation IY*, 34.

⁶⁸ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 16.

⁶⁹ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 20.

⁷⁰ Rudd, *Church Dropouts*, 16.

from any number of world religions, their god just want people to get along. This view also suggests that the main purpose in life is to be happy and to feel good about self. While god is believed to exist, god has no concern or involvement in a person's life except when god is needed to resolve a particular problem. Finally, heaven is a place where good people go when they die.⁷¹

In summary, religion may be viewed as important, but young adults do not give it much thought.⁷² The lack of concern given to faith and the growing view of moralism are contributing factors in the decision of young adults to leave the church or organized religion entirely. The challenge for the Black Church is not only to provide a space for Black theologians to do their work in an uninhibiting and nonthreatening environment, but also to work diligently to close the gap between the Black Church and the African American community. Taking the church to the community, as well as bringing the community into the church is two ways in which this gap must be bridged. Only by taking these tasks seriously and performing them faithfully can Black theology and the Black Church realize their God-given potential as the twenty-first century saviors and liberators of the African-American community.

⁷¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

⁷² Dean, *Almost Christian*, 202.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Pastors as leaders play a significant role in the retention and success of African American males in the church. Many African American males are leaving the church because of poor servant leadership of the pastor, lack of vision in the church, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others and empowerment. There are many theories that support the idea or concept as to why African American males are fleeing the church. One key theory is the Black Lives Matter Movement. The Black Lives Matter Movement drew inspiration from the 1960s civil rights and black power movements, the 1980s black feminist/womanist movement, the 1980s anti-apartheid/Pan African movement, the late 1980s political hip-hop movement, the 2000s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement, and the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement. The Black Lives Matter movement used newly developed social media to reach thousands of like-minded people across the nation quickly to create a black social justice movement that rejected the charismatic male-centered, top-down movement structure that had been the model for most previous efforts. The constant disregard for black life has been so continuous that many African Americans have wondered, “do black lives matter to God?” James Baldwin asked in his book, *The Fire Next Time*, why

God who allegedly loves all people has “cast” blacks “down so far. Why?”¹ Theologian William Jones asked, Is God a white racist and points out that White Americans are so privileged and have so much power and wealth compared to Black Americans that it seems that “God” favors Whites.²

Another key theory is rooted in the concept of servant leadership. Servant leadership is the concept of serving to meet the needs of the people despite the role of leader. In searching the scriptures, the greatest example of a servant leader is Jesus Christ. One of the greatest examples that He left on record was when He took the towel and the water and washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). This act was a display of his servant leadership as well as His humility. The greatest take-away of this lesson was not only the act of the feet washing, but also the fact that Jesus encouraged the disciples to adopt the servant leadership and humility traits as well. Therefore, in theory as clergy attempt to identify ways to alleviate the mass exodus of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty-five, they need to adopt the concept of serving as a servant leader. Also they need to possess traits such as humility, honesty, integrity and genuineness. These traits are of relevance because the young African American males understand and embrace authenticity.

Servant leadership began to emerge as a theory in the 1970s. At that time, “Robert Greenleaf developed a somewhat paradoxical approach to leadership called servant

¹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 30-31.

² William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 7-8.

leadership.”³ Since then, many other leadership experts have further defined the concept. “The biggest difference between a servant-leader and a person who wants to lead an organization is the servant-leader’s motive of putting the needs of others before his or her own needs.”⁴ Russell and Stone conducted a review of the literature on the topic and developed a preliminary theoretical framework depicting servant leadership, with a foundation of identifiable attributes of servant leaders.⁵ Servant leadership is a highly relational process, as is faith development. J. W. Fowler described, “Faith is a relational enterprise, triadic or covenantal in shape.”⁶ He presented a triadic pattern depicting faith.

Along the base line of the triad, we see the two-way flow between the self and others of love, mutual trust and loyalty that make selfhood possible. Above the base line, at the point of the triad, we see a representation of the family’s shared center(s) of value and power. . . . the triad, with its depiction of the structure of mutual trusts and loyalties, discloses the essential covenantal pattern of faith as relational.⁷

As young African American adults seek to establish their identity and develop their personal faith, an environment facilitated by pastors who are servant leaders provides an effective space to maximize growth and encourage success. Young African American people contemplating leaving the church need positive support systems.

³ Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, rev. ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 348.

⁴ Susan R. Komives, Nance Lucas, and Timothy R. McMahon, *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 2006), 74.

⁵ Robert F. Russell and A. Gregory Stone, “A Review of Servant Leadership Attributes: Developing a Practical Model,” *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 23, no. 3 (2002): 145-157.

⁶ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1981), 17.

⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 17.

Russell and Stone discovered servant leadership differed from management in the leader's ability to identify and communicate a shared vision of the future. Kouzes and Posner explained, "exemplary leaders are forward-looking. . . able to envision the future, to gaze across the horizon of time and imagine the greater opportunities to come....they are able to develop an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good."⁸ Greenleaf described the servant leader as being able "to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable."⁹ Unfortunately, "less than one out of every ten senior pastors can articulate the vision for the ministry he or she leads."¹⁰ Composing a vision requires attentiveness on the part of the leader to those he or she is working with as well as patterns and the natural order of things in the world around him or her. Yet, imagining the vision is not the end. Communication of vision to others and empowering them to share in it is essential.

Young adults want a meaningful church experience. When there is a vision and they can contribute to its construction and implementation, it makes young people feel they have a "buy in" with the church's vision. Leaders who fail to encourage and activate a shared vision lose credibility and may appear dishonest and undependable to young adults.

Honesty and integrity are similar. Both relate to being trustworthy, but honesty is most closely associated with telling the truth. Kouzes and Posner reported, "In virtually

⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 105.

⁹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977), 22.

¹⁰ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership: Finding Strength in Shared Responsibility* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 18.

every survey we conducted, honesty was selected more often than any other leadership characteristic. Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership.”¹¹ Participants expressed appreciation for leaders who were willing to tell them the truth, even when it was difficult to hear. Followers welcomed honesty when it came from leaders who had demonstrated care and concern for those they led. Young adults benefit greatly from honest feedback. As important as honesty is to young adults, it transcends culture and generations. It is essential in servant leadership. “No matter the country, the benefits of honesty cannot be overstated. Employees must know where they stand- as they only can with someone who is honest with them.”¹²

Integrity is closely related to ethics which “Has to do with what leaders do and who leaders are...the choices leaders make and how they respond in any given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics.”¹³ Adhering to an embraced moral code can prove challenging to the young adult whose personal faith is still developing. Parks explained, “Mature adult faith composes meaning in a self-conscious engagement in the repeated shipwreck and re-patterning of one’s perceptions of the fabric of life, the dynamic shifting of the assumed connections” in the world around them.¹⁴ Honesty, patience, and support from trusted leaders and mentors will assist young adults with growth and maturity in their lives.

¹¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 14.

¹² Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 15.

¹³ Northouse, *Leadership*, 342.

¹⁴ Sharon Daloz Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), 27.

Trust plays a significant role in the relationship of young adults with their pastors and leaders. Kouzes and Posner related trust as one of the most important attributes of credibility in a leader.¹⁵ Trust can play a pivotal role in the composition of meaning in the life of a young adult. Piaget's cognitive structural theory focused on "how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences."¹⁶ Two key concepts in his development model are assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, information from the world around us is absorbed into existing structures of knowing. In accommodation, present structures must adjust to make sense of information received. The balancing of these dynamics dictates stages in cognitive development. "Piaget described development as an evolving movement from equilibrium through disequilibrium toward a new equilibrium."¹⁷ Parks explained "a potential strength of the Piagetian paradigm is its conviction that humans become absolutely dependent upon the quality of the interaction between the person and his or her environment. The human being does not compose meaning all alone."¹⁸ Networks of belonging and communities around the young adult can factor into their developing worldviews. Trusted adults and mentors contribute to this process significantly. A lack of trust in church leadership affects not only young adults leaving the church, but also potentially the young adult's growth and development.

¹⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 15.

¹⁶ Nancy J. Evans et al., *Student Development in College: Theory, Research and Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 41.

¹⁷ Parks, *The Critical Years*, 35.

¹⁸ Parks, *The Critical Years*, 61.

Greenleaf explained, “The servant-leader is servant first...it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.”¹⁹ In this approach, the leader and his or her ambitions are secondary and the needs and growth of followers that priority.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?²⁰

Russell and Stone indicated stewardship as an accompanying attribute to service. As stewards of the organizations and people they lead, leaders tend to manage the affairs and resources of others.²¹ Greenleaf explained another test of servant leadership is “the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?”²² Social justice is a significant concern to this generation of young adults. Howe and Strauss predicted, “As social activism among Millennials grow in cohesion and effectiveness, it will increasingly target issues of class and income rather than gender or race.”²³ Stewardship may become more and more important in garnering the respect of young adults.

As reviewed by Russell and Stone, service and stewardship carry with them a moral imperative that requires a choice between self and others. As in some other aspects

¹⁹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 13.

²⁰ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 14.

²¹ Russell and Stone, “A Review of Servant Leadership Attributes,” 145-157.

²² Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 14.

²³ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Go to College: Strategies for a New Generation on Campus: Recruiting and Admissions, Campus Life, and the Classroom*, 2nd ed. (Great Falls, VA: LifeCourse Associates, 2007), 123.

of their lives, when it comes to service and social justice, young adults sometimes demonstrate contradictory values. They seem to span several of Kohlberg's moral development stages simultaneously in how they view and practice service and stewardship. The expectations of young adults for social justice often reflect stage four or five thinking. In stage four, "individuals view the social system as made up of a consistent set of rules and procedures applying equally to all people."²⁴ Stage five is when "laws and social systems are evaluated based on the extent to which they promote fundamental human rights and values."²⁵ A discomfort with inequality and injustice reflects this level thinking.

While young adults feel strongly about the moral imperative of service and stewardship, the culture many of them experienced growing up did not teach them well about sacrificing self for the sake of others. In this regard, they often reflect more of Kohlberg's stage two of moral development. "Individuals at the second stage in the preconventional level follow rules if it is in their interest to do so...they maintain a pragmatic perspective, that of ensuring satisfaction of their own needs and wants, while minimizing the possibility of negative consequences to themselves."²⁶ Twenge and Campbell discussed the rampant sense of entitlement and narcissism in American today. They reported, "In data from 37,000 college students, narcissistic personality traits rose just as fast as obesity from the 1980s to the present."²⁷ Elmore explained while young

²⁴ Evans et al., *Student Development in College*, 104.

²⁵ Evans et al., *Student Development in College*, 104.

²⁶ Evans et al., *Student Development in College*, 103-104.

²⁷ Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2009), 2.

adults want to make a difference, “they just don’t have what it takes to accomplish their lofty dreams. When the work becomes difficult, they change their minds and move on to something else. The new term for them is ‘slacktivist’ - they are both slackers and activists.”²⁸ Young adults, in general, focus largely on what is best for them.

Young adults are in desperate need of pastors or pastoral teams in their lives, individuals who are willing to overlook their current weaknesses, realize they are still developing, and earn the trust needed to challenge and encourage them. Cognitive conflict is what helps propel moral development.²⁹ Daloz et al identify two patterns important to developing responsible young adults who can lead in our current, complex world. “These two patterns are trustworthy and transformational relationships...and hospitable spaces within which those relationships may develop and new forms of agency by practiced.”³⁰ Pastors who are willing to serve young adults by challenging and encouraging them and creating safe places for them to wrestle with difficult questions about their own perspectives and the world around them, will have an opportunity to model important traits and help them develop into more competent, thoughtful, responsible leaders.

Pastors embody the values, attitudes, and behaviors they request of others. In a culture that embraces *in loco parentis*, modeling provides a valued and longed for opportunity for young adults to learn from those who have more experience. Often modeling can take the form of mentoring. Daloz et al. explained, “People tend to be

²⁸ Elmore, *Generation IY*, 27.

²⁹ Evans et al., 103.

³⁰ Laurent A. Daloz, C.H. Keen, J.P. Keen, and S.D. Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 53-54.

drawn to mentors who know and have experienced something that they sense they need to learn.”³¹ They respect those adults and pastors or leaders who are consistent in modeling the ideas they espouse.

Although pastors need to articulate a clear vision, “the informal messages are the more powerful teaching and coaching mechanism.”³² Informal messages are those conveyed through the actions of the leader. Kouzes and Posner explained, “Leaders’ deeds are far more important than their words when one wants to determine how serious leaders really are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent.”³³

Pioneering is the process of initiating or participating in change, taking risks, and seeking better ways to doing things. Kouzes and Posner explained, “All leaders challenge the process. Leaders venture out . . . leaders are pioneers. They are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve.”³⁴ Unfortunately, the process of change can be difficult for churches. Barna reported, “Churches are among the most predictable subjects on which a researcher can focus. They change slowly- when they change at all- and they are famous for creating and retaining traditions for long periods of time.”³⁵

Young adults believe appreciation and feedback from their pastor or leader is important. Characteristics in the life of a servant leader that communicate appreciation

³¹ Daloz et al., *Common Fire*, 45.

³² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 258.

³³ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 16.

³⁴ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 18.

³⁵ Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership*, 63.

include being accessible, listening, encouraging, and knowing people personally.

Greenleaf gave a beautiful definition of listening:

I have a bias about this which suggests only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first. When one is a leader, this disposition causes one to be seen as servant first. This suggests a non-servant who wants to be a servant might become a natural servant through a long arduous discipline of learning to listen, a discipline sufficiently sustained that the automatic response to any problem is to listen first. I have seen enough remarkable transformations in people who have been trained to listen to have some confidence in this approach. It is because true listening builds strength in other people.³⁶

Whereas affirmation from a pastor or leader can meet the young adults need for feedback, listening can create a sense of accessibility, trust, and respect for the leader as someone who seeks to understand and serve. Young adults who feel understood and supported are empowered to be effective in their own leadership roles.

Komives et al. describe two dimensions of empowerment. The first is “the sense of self that claims ownership, claims a place in the process, and expects to be involved.”³⁷ For young adults, this often emerges as a desire to see everyone empowered to function in their gifts and talents and to see them taking action. Young adults are not afraid of engaging the entire congregation in ministry. They appreciate pastors who are not afraid of empowering this process of involving everyone, even when it is imperfect!

The second dimension of empowerment is “a set of environmental conditions that promotes the full involvement of participants by reducing the barriers that block the development of individual talent and involvement.”³⁸ Unfortunately, churches do not always effectively empower their members. “Many churchgoers have no choice but to

³⁶ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 17.

³⁷ Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, *Exploring Leadership*, 90.

³⁸ Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, *Exploring Leadership*, 90.

consume ministry because they are not invited and prepared to do ministry . . . millions of individuals, many of whom may indeed be gifted as potential leaders . . . settle for watching rather than engaging in ministry.”³⁹ This dynamic is contradictory to the young adults value of collaboration and teamwork. Churches seeking to engage young adults must empower everyone to use his or her gifts and abilities. This is an example of how young adult leadership philosophy may affect the way churches operate moving forward.

In discussing generational differences, Elmore explained the approach of young adults to leadership. Whereas other generations have respected, endured, replaced, or ignored authority figures, young adults choose their authority figures. Young adults today approach leaders with a shopping mentality. They assess whether those in authority in their lives deserve their allegiance and commitment. The characteristics young adults look for in their leaders reflect servant leadership theories and the attributes listed above. Churches and organizations seeking to engage and retain the current generation of young adults will be most effective as they practice relational models of leadership.

Barna reported, “Most pastors neither see themselves as leaders nor aspire to be leaders . . . only 12 percent said they have the gift of leadership. In contrast, two-thirds of pastors surveyed said they have the gift of teaching or preaching.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, young adults have a much greater need of servant leaders than they do of good preachers or teachers. Many of them download lessons from favorite teachers onto their cell phone, or live stream worship and sermons from around the world on their computers. Young adults desire to be intentional and have a relational connection with their leaders, mentors

³⁹ Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership*, 29.

⁴⁰ Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership*, 17.

and role models. The needs of this generation may dictate changes in how we approach church leadership and ministry preparation. Servant leadership and pastors resonate with the values, needs, and desires of the emerging generation of leaders. Servant leadership also facilitates an effective space for ongoing development, essential if young adults are going to be equipped to lead the church into a complex, ever-changing, and unpredictable future.

As the young adult generation hovers at the impressionable threshold of mature adulthood, there is a window of opportunity to encourage, challenge, and support them. Leaders today can influence their identity, perspectives, and effectiveness for years to come. Developmental theories help provide valuable perspective regarding the importance of young adulthood.

Developmental theories and references highlight the fluidity of young adult understandings of themselves, others, and the world around them. The window or space that exists for servant leaders, mentors, and other trusted leaders to engage in the process of young adult development and meaning making is powerful. Developmental theories present two important reminders for those leading young adults. The first is the reminder that young adults are still defining their identity and identifying their values. “We have seen that the central task of young adulthood is to discover and to compose a faith that can orient the soul to truth and shape a fitting relationship between self and world.”⁴¹ The premise of Parks’ work is young adulthood is the time when a person begins to self-consciously reflect on life’s meaning.⁴² Pastors can serve young adults on their teams by

⁴¹ Parks, *The Critical Years*, 177.

⁴² Evans et al., *Student Development in College*, 202.

recognizing their questions, perspectives, and ideas are often part of this process of self-reflection. For young adults who move into Fowler's Individuative-Reflexive stage, their values and perspectives may evolve or adapt as they reach a more mature adult faith. This stage is characterized by what happens when we take control of our faith, when the authority for our faith comes to reside within us instead of with someone else. This often happens at the same time as other significant life changes like moving away from home. The shift in the center of authority doesn't happen overnight. Moving away from home, or going away to college, can be a trigger to make it happen more quickly or it can initiate the beginning of such a shift. Sometimes this move results in a relocation of authority from parents to someone else and does not represent personally taking on authority. For example, someone might leave a church that is very authoritarian and will move to a different group that still exerts great authority over their members. This is likely not to change in faith stage but merely a change in the particulars of their faith experience.⁴³

If there is a change in the location of authority, these people examine their faith in a way that they really didn't before. They take a step back from the faith that they accepted when they were younger and they begin to ask if this faith really works for them. They engage questions that have been lurking under the surface for a while but hadn't really allowed themselves to address.

Research has found that the individuative-reflective stage happens for people throughout their adult lives. People in this stage are allowing questions to have a foothold in their faith. This can be a powerfully positive experience as people realize that the

⁴³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182.

Christian faith has the sort of depth that holds up well to their questions, especially when they have the opportunity to work through them with thoughtful people who don't give them easy answers. It does not take a theologian to know that God is bigger than we can imagine. It also makes sense that there will be questions for which we just do not have answers. However, a person who listens carefully, thinks through the questions and explores the beginnings of answers with people in this stage of their faith can be a great help. Some people, according to Kenneth Stokes, are told not to question their faith.⁴⁴ This sort of response isn't helpful. People in this stage aren't going to be satisfied with a "Because I told you so" faith, they want something that they can grapple.

People in this stage of faith seek a church community that allows them to express their faith in their own way. At this point, their faith is quite individualistic; for the first time in their lives, their faith belongs to them as a person instead of them as a group. Talking with young adults, it is evident that they have their own personal beliefs that sometimes do not match any church or organized group. Young adults need to define their faith in their own way and accepting someone else's answers are not going to cut it. What is sometimes seen in this kind of faith is a desire to reinvent faith to get at the heart of what people see as "what really counts."

To reinvent faith might involve switching to another church where the faith is perceived as being "alive" or "for real." It might mean getting involved more deeply in church education. It might mean staying in the same church but seeking additional places to grow in faith, whether that is through attending a Bible study at another church,

⁴⁴ Kenneth Stokes, *Faith is a Verb: Dynamics of Adult Faith Development* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989), 19.

attending worship services at another church, or just leaving the church building completely.

Stage four “is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes.”⁴⁵ The support of mature adults helps make this transition more fruitful. A second reminder that developmental theory provides to pastors and leaders of young adults is that change is good. The seeming inconsistencies, doubts, questions, or fluctuations in young adult behavior, perspectives, or decisions can be frustrating for those working with them. However, this process of wrestling with one’s faith and understanding of the world is essential to growth.

Movement from one of these stages to the next is not an automatic function of biological maturation, chronological age, psychological development, or mental age. While each of these factors play a significant role in the ‘readiness’ for stage transition, transition itself occurs when the equilibrium of a given stage is upset by encounters with crises, novelties, and experiences of disclosure and challenge which threaten the limits of the person’s present patterns of constitutive-knowing.⁴⁶

Some individuals fail to engage in Piaget’s “evolving movement from equilibrium through disequilibrium toward a new equilibrium” and as a result reach a certain developmental stage and remain there the rest of their lives.⁴⁷

Work by theorists who have studied the life stages of young adults will assist in the understanding of where they are to increase ministry effectiveness. Jean Piaget’s work in cognitive development reveals that young adults are at the prime of their ability

⁴⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182.

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 27.

⁴⁷ Parks, *The Critical Years*, 35.

to do abstract thinking and enjoy talking about deeper and more difficult issues. Many churches are uncomfortable entertaining these difficult questions because it tests the strength of longstanding church doctrines and positions. Fowler relies on Piaget's cognitive development work in his theory of faith development and has identified a personal ownership of one's faith emerges with struggles. A deep hunger exists for a personal relationship with God who knows, loves, and affirms.

African American males are at a pivotal point in their life journeys. The church has a unique opportunity to challenge them to be the present and future bearers of the gospel message to their generation. The stages where African American males exist which give the church great opportunity, at the same time can also distance the young adult from sources of spiritual authority. The challenge of the church is to capture the imagination and passion for spiritual growth in the young adult age at the very time they may be experiencing tremendous uncertainty and disorientation.

The absence of African American males has crippled the black church. The social justice in black churches have not moved forward because of the absence of African American males and their respective families. Many young African American males have questioned the necessity of the church. Young African American males identify themselves as Christian but are not church-goers. The decline in attendance has caused discussions with church leaders and parishioners.

The Barna Group and Focus on the Family are two groups that have studied the exodus of young adults and youth in the church. The Barna Group is led by young adults desiring the church to be open to the differences of the twenty-first century. Dr. David Kinnaman founded the Barna Group in 1984. Dr. Kinnaman has conducted research and

surveys on young adults who do not attend church and the issues they have with the church. Dr. Kinnaman theorizes that the church has lost sight of its purpose. According to Kinnaman, young adults reject the church because the church is judgmental, the church is insensitive, and the church is hypocritical. Dr. Kinnaman compared this outside view of young adults about the church with the teaching by Jesus of forgiveness, oneness, love, brotherhood, and harmony. Dr. Kinnaman has also identified three groups of young adults that leave the church as prodigals, nomads, and exiles.

The nonprofit organization, Focus on the Family, has conducted research and led various discussions on why young adults are missing in churches through publishing, radio broadcasts and support of various churches. This organization promotes conservative views on issues surrounding marriage, parenting, sex, public policy, and lifestyle. One of the key summaries of the Focus on the Family organization is the young adults leaving the church is a matter of the home and more healthy homes would lead to better retention of young adults in the church. One of the key summaries of their study states that strong families produce lasting faith and that children coming from homes where faith is practiced seriously (but not perfectly) are strongly predicted to carry that faith into adulthood. The Focus on Family organization concluded that people should create homes where children learn and witness a vibrant faith that's lived out honestly and intentionally and where perfection is not required, only diligence and faithfulness.⁴⁸

As African American males are transitioning from young adults to adulthood, their opinions and positions on varying issues will change. Several different theories have

⁴⁸ Andrew Hess and Glenn T. Stanton, "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention," Focus on the Family, originally published August 1, 2013, October 16, 2015, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/millennial-retention.aspx.

been discussed to help with understanding the reasons African American males are leaving the church. Black Lives Matter activists have heard throughout their lives that they have to become respectable to avert a bad future. Many believe that the church has discredited itself by constantly preaching this message and has put church leaders on the defensive. Black Lives Matter is harshly critical of everything ranging from respectability to politics. It is not enough for church leaders to reply that African American males don't know much history. The Black Lives Matter movement has created a new generation of defiant activist leaders determined to break white supremacy. There is more interfaith community organizing occurring today than ever with a stronger than ever emphasis on racism.

In summary, churches must have a commitment to the full humanity of one another that is exhibited in Christ's life and work. Black Lives Matter describes itself as an ideological and political intervention in a world where black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity and our resilience in the face of oppression. The Black Lives Matter movement for the basic respect, dignity, and protection of black lives is not going away. The movement has issued a call to the black church to affirm a theology of resistance rather than a theology of respectability.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty in a rural community of northwest Florida are faced with many mental and physical challenges. The purpose of this project and qualitative study was to research and identify the reasons that the young men within this age group are leaving the church. This study and project were also researched to create a model to teach pastors and lay persons how to reach and reclaim African American men between the ages of twenty-one to forty as well as making that a reality in the Mt Zion Church.

Most men in our society today do not see the value of going to church because it is not speaking their language, and it is not addressing the issues they face. Men want questions answered about work, family, marriage, sexuality and finances. These topics are rarely addressed from the pulpit today. Men want to be involved in something driven by a compelling vision. Men want to know what hill the church is climbing, where the church is going, and what the church is about. The church has the greatest and most far-reaching mission on earth. Men want to win; they want to be heroes; and they want to come in first. In many instances, men do not accomplish these tasks because there is no father figure in their homes or in their lives.

The theorists have not changed the masses of African American men leaving the church. What are the churches really doing? African American churches must take seriously how African American males understand themselves. They have questions such as how they view the world and how they behave. How they feel about their experiences as black males needs to be considered from church leadership. In addition, the African American church, in an effort to minister to African American males, must resist the temptation to view African American masculinity from a monolithic standard, one generally replete with negative images and destructive representations. Most importantly, the African American church must be a moral incubator which aids in the reconstruction of African American masculinity.

In this project personal interviews and a six-week study/training sessions were conducted to build a foundational core for recruiting African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. Until you have walked a step in the world of a young African American male, it is hard to get a true understanding on how the highs and lows of this age group works. The African American church has played an instrumental role in the religious and social life of black Americans in the past, and we must continue to make the African American church the battleground to recruit and retain African American males. The church cannot concede this age group and demographic in its work of discipleship and evangelism. Persons in this age group are too the object of God's love, for them Christ has died. The church must not mirror society in how it disregards many in this age group. For sure, there are some churches doing great work in this regard, but they are few and far in between. A wakeup call is needed for the church to do more in this regard.

Methodology

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research is undergirded by the fundamental premise to teach and minister to the needs of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty to assist with maintaining their presence and recruiting others who are absent from the church. It has been proven that African American males are “an endangered species.” This situation is so prevalent and persistent that no one has to look far for evidence. Both past and current historical records reveal how African American males are disproportionately incarcerated, socially neglected, economically disenfranchised, under employed and unemployable, emotionally suppressed and mistreated, and viewed with suspicion and distrust.

If the church is going to help retain African American males between the ages of twenty-one and forty, we must find ways to help make a positive difference in their lives. Not only do they matter to us, but they matter to God as well. Throughout scripture, God seems to actively seek out at least five distinct types of people: the poor, the sick, the orphans, the widows, and the imprisoned.

The goal of this model was to use a qualitative method that would include a six-week training/study session. African American males were interviewed and workshops were conducted to educate pastors and laymen regarding ways to attract and retain Africa Males in Mt. Zion AME Church.

Intervention

The context of this research was Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Crestview, Florida. The researcher set the stage by announcing a six-week training/study and interviews for African American males between the ages of twenty-one and forty to come out to the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church to enjoy free food, fun and fellowship. Flyers were given out at barbershops, corner stores and men in general sitting around “under the trees.” At the initial meeting on July 23, 2016, eighteen men showed up for the informational meeting, food, games of checkers, chest, dominos, and cards. The researcher explained the purpose of the meeting and the focus of the six weeks of training/study and interviews. Each person who was seriously interested in the research was asked to remain after the fellowship. There were eight men willing to be a part of this research project and faithfully attended/participated in the interviews and sessions. The Participant’s Consent Letter and Form (Appendix A and B) were given to each willing participant. They were given a copy of the Interview Questions (Appendix C) and the Agenda and Dates of Training (Appendix D) at the initial meeting.

Research Design

The researcher utilized a maximal variation within the purposive sampling method to select four black males who were at once very active in the church and left the church and four black males who never joined a church congregation for a total number of eight individuals to participate in one-on-one interviews and training/study sessions for this study. The intent of maximal variation sampling is to allow the researcher to select

participants that may have different viewpoints of the phenomena¹. This sample size is appropriate for the qualitative research because a qualitative researcher selects a small number of participants who can contribute meaningful information about the phenomenon. The intent of the qualitative researcher is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the experiences and perspectives of the sample population and not to make generalizations of the findings, as do quantitative researchers.

Measurement and Instrumentation

This study used taped and transcribed semi-structured interviews to describe personal and professional perspectives and understandings experienced by the participants.² The project consisted of eight African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty. Four of them were once dedicated and very active members and left the church, and four of them have never joined a church congregation. The context associates were pastors and lay persons willing to help in this six-week project. These associates were the “guides on the side” to offer advice and comments. The qualitative questions were as follows (Appendix C):

- What has turned you from mainstream church?
- What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed?

¹ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011), 64.

² C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication, 1994), 104.

- What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man?
- What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left?
- What are the pros and cons of not attending church?

The lived experiences of this qualitative group will assist pastors and laity to become ambassadors, mentors, and coaches for others who have lost hope in the church.

Written transcripts were reviewed by the researcher to insure compatible interpretations of data. The duration of the interviews was approximately sixty minutes and took place in the church's conference room during a time convenient for participants. Questions were one-on-one semi-structured, and all participants received the same questions. Open- and closed-ended questions were followed up with probing and encouraged discussion of issues. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Stakeholders

The researcher identified four Professional Associates, two Peer Associates, and eleven Context Associates as stakeholders for this research study. The Professional Associates and the Peer Associates were my constant “guides on the side,” my panel of experts, and always there for me. Rev. Dr. Michael J. Johnson is the pastor of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church and Dean of Selman University Pensacola. He provided assistance by overseeing the Implementation and Methodology of research. Rev. Dr. Julius McAllister is the pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Dean of Students for the Florida Conference of the AME Church. He provided insight on

Research Design and Ministry Practice. Dr. Anita Gantt, an Escambia School District Administrator, was instrumental with Research and Project Planning. Dr. Marian Y. Torrence, EEOC Coordinator and Recruiter for the Escambia School District, was the major editing resource and helped with the Foundations for Ministry. My two Peer Associates were Rev. Dr. James Morris, an AME Pastor, and Rev. Pierre Olemar, a Seventh-Day Adventist Pastor.

The recommendations from the panel of experts were used to determine the content validity for the final development and administration of the training/study sessions and the interview instrument. The researcher solicited the support of an expert panel to determine if questions and agenda on training/study sessions were valid. The panel members' experience consisted of experts who are school district administrators, a Methodist pastor and a Baptist pastor. A pilot test was conducted for the training/study sessions and the interview instrument with these professionals.

The panel members were assigned to conduct the first review of the training/study agenda and the interview instrument. The researcher sent an email to invite the panel of experts to participate as committee members. The e-mail included: (a) the purpose and intent of the study, (b) research questions, (c) interview questions, and (d) outline for the training/study sessions. The professional associates were asked to provide annotations to ensure clarity of each question and to measure the content they were intended to measure. This was done directly on the training/study session agenda and the interview instrument; then the professional associates and peer associates were to scan and email the recommendations to the researcher within seven days of receipt.

The committees recommended several rewording to provide clarity to the reader on the agenda for the training/study sessions. They also stated that the interview questions were straightforward and easy to understand. The researcher revised the agenda and sent it back to the professional associates.

There were eleven Context Associates committed from beginning to the end of the interview and training/study sessions. The Context Associates were Katrinia Stakley, Flether Williams, Yveta Watson, George Stakley, Henry Balckshear, Eli German, Eddie Chappell, Carl Watson, Sherry Flavors, Rosetta German and Barbara Travis. They genuinely performed the following assignments: flyers, set up of fellowship hall, typing, recording of names and attendance sheets, assisting with data and research, copying, refreshments, workshop assistants, proctoring, preparation of food, clean-up, transportation, reception and counseling. To God be the glory for the faithfulness of the stakeholders during this entire journey.

Implementation

Field Project

The Professional Associates and Context Associates had been acquainted with the thoughts of this project since the researcher came to United Theological Seminary in January 2013. The researcher had been speaking with the Professional Associates each month about the desire of my research, and I wanted each one to be on my committee. I had constantly spoken to the church body about the recruitment and retention of men in our church, and that is where my Context Associates wholeheartedly volunteered to do anything and everything to get young men back in the church and to get them active. It

was extremely important that we worked to “take back” our African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. The initial meeting with the Professional Associates and Context Associates to work cooperatively on the training/study sessions and the interview questions was held February 20, 2016. I treated all of them to a luncheon.

On March 19, 2016, the second meeting for the context associates was held at the church; and following a catered luncheon, we discussed the plans and preparation for the weekly training/study sessions, the flyers, dinner menus and ways to get the word out that we are in the process of recruiting those who have once been involved in church and also those who have never been involved. We did some brainstorming and organized in committees of things each person was responsible for during the next meeting. We met bi-weekly to ensure that things were progressing and we had a “check and balance system” for accountability.

The church approved during Official Board the utilization of the entire building, and the researcher was thankful to the trustees on the context associate committee who served to assure that the church, kitchen, fellowship hall, and restrooms were in proper working condition, and the air conditioner system was comfortable for each meeting.

Training/Study Sessions

Every week of training and study sessions began with welcome, dinner and fellowship which each participant enjoyed and no one ever missed a week of attending the sessions (See Appendix E). During week one, August 3, 2016, the title of the presentation was “When your Back is Against the Walls.” The presenters for week one

were the Researcher, Associate Minister and the Context Associates. The Researcher talked about Chapter 2 of Daniel where Daniel’s “Back was against the wall” and when King Nebuchanezzar had a dream that greatly troubled him. The wise men from Babylon, Daniel and his Hebrew friends would be put to death because they could not interpret King Nebuchanezzar’s dream.

The researcher explained that when it comes to handling “Back to the Wall Experiences”, remember that no matter what tight place we may find ourselves in, God is going to supernaturally get us out of it. Regardless of the situation, trust God and He will go through the situation with you. There are times when God wants to deepen us rather than rescue us. In Daniel’s case, he and his friends found themselves in a threatening situation that was not of their own making. They really did not know if God was going to deliver them from it. One thing that they did know was that their God could be trusted.

There was a Round Table activity with the following questions to discuss: (1) Things we can do when our backs are against the wall. (2) How can we help others when their backs are against the wall? (3) What does God want from us as men when we need to help other brothers with their backs against the wall?

During Week two, August 10, 2016, of the training/study sessions, the presentation was on “The Power of Unity.” The Presenters were the Researcher, Associate Minister, and Context Associates. The Researcher used an outline and bibles for this session. There was discussion on how we need unity in the church. In this day and age in a time, when there is so many divisions within and without, we need to be unified in the House of the Lord. We can always do more together than we can do apart. We discussed how we could achieve unity in the church of the Lord today.

Discussion was given on God's desire for His people to be unified and how Jesus prayed for unity, died for unity and how God's nature demands unity. We learned that true unity is oneness with the same mind, same goals and same heart. There were open discussions about the hindrances to unity and if it was possible to have union without having unity. Things that keep Christians from having true love for one another were:

- “My Way” or “The Highway” attitude
- Backbiting and gossiping (Romans 1:30; Proverbs 25:23; Proverbs 20:19)
- Complaining and murmuring (Philippians 2:14)
- Apathy, I just don't care about anything
- Unfaithfulness, Revelation 2:10; Matthew 6:33)
- Old Squabbles (Philippians 4:2, Ruth)

There were also open and honest discussions on the power of unity and how there is strength, encouragement, and help in unity by having the mind of Christ, realizing that this is not all about ME, and determination to become united.

Week three, August 17, 2016, of the training/study session was entitled: “Spiritual Mentorship.” The presenters for this session were the researcher and the Context Associates. The opening Roundtable discussion during dinner was “What do you want in a mentor here at the church?” The background scripture for the evening was I Corinthians 4: 14-21. There are many church members who have been in the church twenty, thirty and even fifty years and have never been a spiritual father or mother in either sense. We are called to move beyond being a child and to being a spiritual leader and mentor.

Brainstorming on the traits of a mentor are:

- A mentor speaks the hard truth. So many people walk around making bad spiritual decisions, and amazingly, the other Christians around them all stand back and watch as mistakes are repeated again and again. We need someone who loves us enough to come to us with the hard truth and say to us: “That relationship is destructive for you” “Your anger is inappropriate,” “You seem to be pulling back from your church family.”
 1. Our desire cannot be to add shame to their name, but rather to see their behavior changed and their relationship with God redeemed.
- A mentor gives his heart away. Paul, even when writing hard words, is quick to share his love for the Corinthians. If we are going to be spiritual mentors, we have to be willing to be the first to share our hearts with words of love, encouragement, and compassion. We must love enough to speak words of bold love to our brothers.
- A mentor forges the trail. Paul’s words leave many uncomfortable, but the truth is a simple one: we must be able to say to those we mentor, “Don’t just do as I say; do as I do.” I’m not just going to pray, I’m going to show you what a man of prayer looks like.” “I’m not going to just talk about forgiveness, I’m going to show you what forgiving an enemy looks like.” “I’m not just going to talk about Jesus, I’m going to show you what Jesus looks like.” We cannot expect anyone we mentor to go to levels of maturity that we have not experienced ourselves.
- A mentor opens doors. In verse 17, Paul tells of Timothy’s imminent arrival in order to help them to grow. Some might presume that being in a mentoring relationship means holding tight to your control over the person, but that is not

true. You want to introduce the person to other mature believers and other positive spiritual influences that can add more to what you've shared. A spiritual mentor is looking to expand his spiritual child's world of influence.

- A mentor shares biblical wisdom. There is no substitute for a solid grounding in the Word. Mentoring is about developing a relationship and friendship, but it is not only about that. There must be a passion for spiritual maturity that comes from the Word.
- A mentor is not afraid to kick you in the seat of your pants. When the situation warrants, a mentor is not afraid to get serious with the discipline. We are talking here about a serious spiritual error that requires a serious response. The one who loves the spiritual child must also be willing to discipline the spiritual child.

Week 4 of our training/study sessions was held on August 24, 2016, and it was about education and careers. The presenters for this evening was the researcher, Context Associates, Representatives from the Okaloosa School District and Northwest Florida College. The thought-provoking questions were: "Are you struggling with an educational and career decision?" "Are you wondering which direction the Lord desires you to go?"

As Christians, we desire to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. We want to do His will in all aspects of our lives: the daily choices we make that govern our actions and the large life decisions we have to make. We long to make the "right" decisions: the choices that prove to be good for us and that the one we believe God would have us make. The bible teaches us some important principles that can assist you in becoming a wise decision maker.

- Our first priority in life must be to develop an increasingly intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Being rooted in Christ is a fundamental “prerequisite” to finding God’s will for your career. You will not be ready or able to find the career path He has designed for you unless you are seeking Him first. God has created you with the aptitude for particular skills and abilities and with the inclination toward particular interests. Each one of you men has been given work-related gifts that have been chosen specifically for you (Romans 12: 6-8). God desires for you to use the gifts He has given you that includes making good career decisions you must have a thorough knowledge of your personality, skills, abilities, interests and values.
- Being a Christian does not exempt us from the responsibility to become wise decision makers. Therefore, it is your responsibility to use your God-given mind to learn how to make good career decisions. Learning how to make decisions is a part of developing wisdom and maturity, both of which God desires for us. The book of Proverbs is full of admonitions about the importance of gaining wisdom to live a life that is pleasing to God. The proverbs are given to us “for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life (Proverbs 1: 1-3). God desires for us to have not only spiritual maturity and wisdom but also wisdom that relates to making decisions in this life.
- Living out God’s will for your career and life will require that you take risks. God does not call us to risk-free living because we would not need to develop our “faith muscles.” God works to impress upon our hearts and minds a need, a cause

or an interest that we develop a desire to do something about, then to lead us one step at a time. Learning to take risks is an essential part of following God and living out His will for our lives. Without risks, a person's life becomes a process of digging an ever deeper rut in which you stagnate and cut yourself off from all that God intends life to be (Hebrews 11:1; Ephesians 3: 20-21).

The representatives from Okaloosa School District and Northwest Florida College were available to talk with the men about ABE/GED programs and about technical and college careers.

Week five, August 31, 2016, was the week for the researcher, context associates and Law Enforcement Officers to present "All Lives Matter." There are three things that are essential to the brain and one's ability to perform at work, at home, and in life; and they are safety, belonging and mattering. Everyone wants to matter and everyone should matter. All lives matter to God. When we kneel down to pray to Him, God does not look at the color of the skin before listening and responding to us. The Lord looks at our hearts (I Samuel 16:7). To God, all lives matter.

- We are all made in the image of God. God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female human beings and that means all (Genesis 1:27).
- We all have the same opportunity with God. "And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Notice that opportunity to please God extends to anyone.

- Christ died for all of us. “He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Take notice of the word everyone.

So how should we follow His example and make everyone feel they matter? By practicing the Golden Rule which calls us to treat others as you want to be treated.

My life matters; your life matters; ALL lives Matter!

Seek God first and His righteousness, and then go out and treat others in a way that is pleasing to God because all lives matter!

Week six was the culminating activities for our training/study session. It was held September 7, 2016, and this evening included all people who came out to speak, assist, and volunteer which included the eight males who participated and their families. They were given certificates for attendance and participation. They each got a chance to speak when given their certificate and eight out of eight said they were willing and ready to go to work in the church and start a new life living for God. We offered the “invitation to Christian discipleship” and all eight African American males came forward to join and/or rejoin Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. The angels were rejoicing for these men who have become “Born Again!” Praise the Lord for His goodness and mercies that are renewed every day. There was not a dry eye in the fellowship hall. We serve an awesome God!!

Interviews

The eight African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty were interviewed to probe and try to understand why they are not interested in church and

specifically to assist in finding solutions to recruit and retain this age group of males at Mt. Zion AME Church. The eight males volunteered to be individually interviewed using an audio tape to record the accuracy of their comments.

Each participant was scheduled a time and date for individual interviews with the researcher at the convenience of the participant. Interviews were approximately forty-five to sixty minutes in length.

Participant 1 was a twenty-two-year-old that never joined a church in his life. He said that his momma or big momma never attended church and did not see the need to attend. He would only attend funerals in churches growing up.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? His answer was that he was never turned from mainstream church but he never went to church. He never even got an Easter suit to attend church as a child. When they would go to church for a funeral, his big momma would buy him something to wear. So he was not ever turned on or turned off by attending church. He has watched church on television many times while flipping through the channels on Sundays but has just never thought about really going to church.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? He really did not know, but when he went to the barbershop and hang out with the fellows that go to church, they were always talking about some problems in the church.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? He said he was a little selfish and self-centered because he had no obligations to no one but himself. He does not have children or a steady girlfriend. He is still in the house with his momma and big momma. His big momma raised him because his momma is only fourteen years older than he is, and they were raised together. Big momma, who is fifty-two did not get much education. Both of them, his mom and Participant 1, are drop outs. He will get a job but somehow cannot keep a job. He does enough to keep a car and buy what he wants out of his money. He does not have a lot of respect for men because he does not know where his father is and too many men have been in and out of his mother's life mistreating her.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give the church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? He said he has never given the church the first opportunity and he would have no problem trying to learn to be a man and for fellowshiping with men.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? He said he guess the pros would be to learn about God and men and the cons would be the gossip he hears about church.

Participant 2 is a twenty-four- year old single man that has a high school diploma and a decent job in town. He went to church some as a young man but never joined and never found the right crew that took him “under his wings” to learn about “real church.” He and his girlfriend live together, and they have a nine-month old daughter.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? He did not grow up going to church and really does not see too much of a need to begin going now. He sees too much negative gossip about the preacher, the members and money. There is nothing for young adults to do in the church.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? Helping people get a good job and advancing the chance of getting good jobs. Offering some type of brotherly fellowship to help men who were not raised with fathers become good fathers.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? He said that he could not stand hearing church gossip going on among church folks and how obvious that church people do not like each other and the pastor unless it was something in it for them.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? Seeing people who are really serious about programs in the church that will help men become better men in the church. Programs that would teach the bible in ways people could really understand.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? Pros were not hearing gossip and talking about money. Cons were not learning about God and what I need to do as a man to be strong in my home.

Participant 3 is a twenty-seven-year old single man that does not have a high school education or his own transportation. He lives with his grandmother in low income housing. His mother is in jail and he has two children from different mothers that are five and six years old. He would go to church with his grandmother sometimes, but she did

not make him go and could not make him get out of the bed on Sunday mornings to go to church.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? Listening to the gossip of his grandmother and all the other ladies of her age group about the church and how awful things are every week.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? Learning to be a man and do something with his life. Learning to be able to stand up and take care of responsibilities.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? He said just listening to negative comments from his grandmother and she goes twice a month has made him not want to go to church or even not want to be a part of organized church. He does not feel there are men or real men in the church and the women are doing everything.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? The church quit the backbiting and really step up to the plate to help him out in getting himself together.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? Freedom to watch TV church and no money involved. No one climbing over the next person to get to the top. Not having to hear the gossip about nothing that matters. The cons are not getting to know Jesus and learning what I need to know to get his life together.

Participant 4 is a thirty-year old male with a college education, a good job, an educated wife and three children. They live comfortably but neither the husband nor wife never attended church regularly when they were coming up in life. They both enjoy television ministry and send seed offerings in to televangelists.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? The church not stepping up helping those in need. When he was a boy coming up, his mother fell on tough time and she died when he was in high school. He went from home to home and the homes he was in did not teach or care about church. The church seems not to care.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? How to help people help themselves when they are struggling. How to be servant to hurting people who need someone to learn on. Who to help people find resources that will build them up.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? He decided that he would not pattern his life like the pretending church folks without a heart and love for people.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? Fellowship with other men and men who care about progressing. Men helping each other and building each other up to be better men, husbands, and fathers.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? Pros of not attending is that you do not have people asking and begging you all the time for donations. Cons of not attending is that you do not grow in the knowledge of Christ and you really do not have a church family for you and your family to grow in.

Participant 5 is thirty-one years old who was once a faithful member of the church, single, and is living at home with both of his parents.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? The blatant disrespect of the intellectual millennials.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? The lack of respect for males and nurturing them and assisting them in attaining their goals. How the church does not teach love the sinner and hate the sin.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? How the church has not progressed in terms of identifying the strengths of black males and bridging them to better development of leadership roles.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? Some type of trainings and workshops to strategize the marginalized and oppressed in this category and address this dying breed of men.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? The pro would be no drama and begging. The con would be traditional values broken, no peace about me knowing what God has done for my life.

Participant 6 is a thirty-five-year old who was once a faithful member of the church who is single and loving life. He has his own home, well-educated and living a great life.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? The “pomp and circumstances” of the bureaucracy of the church. The constant fundraising and phony people.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? The church has not addressed young black males and their roles. It took his attendance and tithes as a joke. It seemed not to want him as a young man at the table to talk but always wanted his money on the table.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? The constant hurt and criticism about the young men his age group. No programs to encourage the participation and drive to keep going to church. Still a young boy mentality instead of what the church can offer to encourage young men.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? To sit down at the table with the “powers that be” at the church and be seriously considered a priority and not an option. To see ministries and resources dedicated to black males who have been hurt, isolated and ostracized.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? Pros are not having to get dressed and drive to deal with a show of gossip. Cons are not communal spirit of fellowship and kindred love for your brothers. Not attaining personal satisfaction of getting a “Word” in the House of God.

Participant 7 is forty-years old and was once a very faithful member and steward in the church. He and his wife are both educated and have four children.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? The pastor had become a dictator and told the members that they were part of the problem and that they were no longer needed. The pastor had his own agenda and isolated the people who had his back.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? The pastor lacked education and had been pastoring for thirty-eight years. The pastor could not effectively lead and shepherd the young adults in the church and did not want any input from that age group.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? The pastor was doing all he could to make the young people feel uncomfortable and not wanted in “his” church. He had no programs to include or encourage young people to take part and participate. He only wanted money and nothing else.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? Sending a younger pastor or new pastor that care about fellowship, increasing membership and loving the people.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? Pros for not attending church is I get to go and play golf and spend quality time with my family. We catch up on housework. The cons for not attending church is the fellowship with people and learning more about God's word.

Participate 8, is a thirty-year old and was once a faithful trustee in the church. He and his wife are both educators and they have two children.

Question 1: What has turned you from mainstream church? The pastor only cared about "me, me, me." No one cared about the congregation and building a togetherness in the church. No care for the advancement of males in the church. The pastor was only concerned about his money and no ministries.

Question 2: What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed? Working with the community to make stronger young men that will be good fathers and husbands. Ignoring the hurting population and how the church can benefit others. Issues of racial justice and economic empowerment for the community.

Question 3: What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man? Church hurt and not addressing hurting people without jobs, education, and family values. Wanting to see men step up to the plate and strive to be better men, fathers, and husbands.

Question 4: What would be the motivating factor or factors to give the church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left? A pastor that wants to make positive differences in the lives of all members that are in the church and left the church, the community and the city. The church being for outreach and programs to get the attention and interest of young adults.

Question 5: What are the pros and cons of not attending church? The pros of not attending church is to watch football and other sporting events all day, to sleep late and just be lazy. The cons of not attending church is the fellowship with people and the building of his faith.

Collection of Data

The research design for the qualitative phase was a phenomenological approach.³

Phenomenological research is a “strategy of inquiry”⁴ in which the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon is identified and described by participants. Moustakas describes a phenomenological study as “understanding the lived experiences that marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of participants through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.”⁵

These participants represented an acceptable sample size of lived experiences of the total research population for a qualitative phenomenological study as indicated by Leedy and Ormrod.⁶ Patton stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry.”⁷ Another scholar, Groenewald, considered two to ten participants as sufficient to reach *saturation* for a qualitative study.⁸ A confirmation letter explained the purpose of the study, the guarantee of anonymity, the goal of the study, and a request for informed

³ F. L. Locke, W. W. Spirduso and S. J. Silverman, *Proposals that Work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication, 2007), 19.

⁴ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Sage, 2009), 1.

⁵ Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 95.

⁶ Leedy, P. D. and Ormrod, J. E. (2001). *Practical Research Planning and Design* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 23.

⁷ M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication, 2002), 244.

⁸ T. Groenewald, (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3, no.1(2004), 4-15.

consent to participate in an hour-long, face-to-face, tape-recorded interview (Appendix A) was given to each participant.

Data Analysis

Study participants were asked to respond to interview questions based on their lived experiences. Moustakas stated, “The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience.”⁹ The researcher sought to answer research questions by asking eight participants five semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B). This approach provided an in-depth understanding of the personal factors of importance in understanding the decline of these eight African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is a method of selecting the study sample from an accessible population determined to be appropriate for information for the study.¹⁰ This purposive sampling was used to select a representative sample of that accessible population, but did not rely only on those participants who are convenient and available.

The semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted to gather descriptive and specific information from the eight African American males. The duration of the

⁹ Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 47.

¹⁰ Gliner, J. L. and G. A. Morgan, (2000). *Research methods in applied settings: An integrated approach to design and analysis*. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Publisher, 2000), 124.

interviews was approximately sixty minutes and took place in the conference room of the church during the day or at a time that was convenient for the participants. Questions were one-on-one and all participants received the same questions. Open and closed ended questions were followed up with probing and encouraged discussion of issues. Interview questions are in Appendix B.

After interviewing the eight African American males, the salient point that they all shared were:

- Desiring fellowship with genuine God-fearing men
- A deep longing to learn more about God and His Word and to become stronger men
- Ministries that offer resources to better prepare and educate African American males in the world we live in
- Tired of hearing negative gossip about the church, the congregants, and the pastors of churches

The four who had never joined a church had no male role models in their life, money issues and felt that the church had no heart and genuine love for men who needed a voice. They had all never attended church growing up or if they were around people who went to church, it was always negative comments and gossip about the pastor, members and money. They felt that the church was not a place they wanted to be associated with and would rather “run the other way!”

The cons for the four that never joined a church was not getting to know Jesus and learning His Word and no fellowship with genuine men to assist them in their struggles

of everyday life. They all knew the need of fellowship and resources to improve their daily lives.

The four men who were once faithful members of the church had all gotten “burned out” with gossiping, backbiting, no leadership with pastors, disrespect of their age group, church hurt and lack of role models and nurturing to obtain higher goals. They would go and have no peace when they would leave church; there were no ministries and resources to engage and encourage their attendance and always talk about money and not soul saving. The pros for the four that were once faithful members of the church and now not attending church are they can sleep late, watch television ministries that will not cost them any money, watch sports, play sports, spend more time with family and friends doing what makes them happier than going into the church to “listen to people who don’t have a heart for God.”

Limitations

The limitations of this study was the small sample size of eight African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty in one rural community and one African Methodist Episcopal Church. Another limitation is that this study only included a small sample of African American males and not African American females that have also exited the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The generalizability of the findings for this qualitative study were limited. Creswell stated, “Qualitative procedures demonstrate a different approach to scholarly

inquiry than methods of quantitative research.”¹¹ “The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize findings, but to form a unique interpretation of events.”¹²

One of the assumptions of qualitative research is the researcher is the primary instrument used in gathering data.¹³ Researchers collect data themselves in qualitative research through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. In this study, data collection was through semi-structured interviews of participants as prescribed by Creswell. In this case, the researcher did rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. A set of five interview questions (see Appendix B) were used to pose questions to participants regarding personal attributes. Explaining this process made it easier for someone else to replicate the study and using descriptive writing assisted in addressing the reliability issue, and keeping a paper trail of the process will aid in replication.

The researcher conducted a “semi-structured interview, audiotaped the interview, and transcribed the interview.”¹⁴ A tape recorder was used to record all interviews and to ensure accuracy of participants’ comments. This and the training sessions (see Appendix C) were the primary methods of data collection for this study. The researcher took brief notes during each interview. The training sessions were held each week for six consecutive weeks. This time included food, fellowship and being able to talk honestly about thoughts, ideas, suggestions and what to do to recruit and retain African American

¹¹ Creswell, *Research Design*, 173.

¹² Creswell, *Research Design*, 146.

¹³ Creswell, *Research Design*, 175.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, 182.

males between the ages of twenty-one to forty in the Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Summary of Learning and Conclusion

The knowledge, wisdom and learning that I have experienced at United Theological Seminary since I enrolled in December 2013 has been the most awesome experiences in my life. I have been exposed to a whole new world of teaching and learning. I have shared my experiences with so many and have encouraged my brothers and sisters to enroll in seminary and it will open a whole new life. The classes I took have helped me to become a more open-minded, caring, giving and patient person.

The Intensive classes were very culturally relevant to my theme of recruitment and retention of African American males and assisted me with church administration and preaching in a multicultural world. My mentors challenged me to come up with sermon ideas on each thematic thrust. Holiness and idolatry were the first subjects that forced me to look at myself through different lenses of ministry and correlate it to ministry because so many times we do not have the means to process our tensions in ministry.

Our churches in the 21st century are ministering in the premise that All Lives Matter, especially Black Lives. The plenary by Attorney Donald McNeal challenged me to wrestle with church tensions. The Intensive classes on Disabilities showed me that all of us must be able to work with people with disabilities and people who are different. I have learned to be more sensitive to the needs of my congregants with known disabilities because after searching my inner self, I found my own disabilities and how people with

disabilities are sometimes mistreated and not afforded the best that churches and life can give them.

In the Evangelism classes, we had some awesome preaching by Bishop Vashti McKenzie and Dr. Sir Walter Mack. They both preached how to put evangelism into practice and the relevancy of Intergenerational Evangelism that ties directly to my research on reaching the lost generation of black males. During my last Intensive classes, Dr. F. Willis Johnson and Rev. Rudy Rasmus blessed us with topics on Making Disciples in a Multicultural World. We were taught unique ministry opportunities in these classes of moving from plain membership to proactive discipleship.

Dr. Kenneth Cummings walked us through a great Biblical narrative of a perfectly exegetical story that challenged us to let the fire in us burn and ignite others to carry the flames of love to tell a dying unchurched world that we mean business.

The disappointments faced in this journey included trying to get the “buy in” from my congregation that we must do outreach and evangelism to bring men back into the church and not only bringing them in but also getting them involved and motivated. It took several weeks for my congregation to really understand that this is a ministry we must reach because we had lost the African American males ages twenty-one to forty in our churches and our communities. It took a lot of prayer and fasting, but eventually the congregation got “on board” and wanted to make positive differences in the lives of men. It was hard observing firsthand the alarming statistics and acknowledging that these demographics could have not only been me, but all those that are dear to me. Hearing the stories of church hurt, which I am personally at a crossroad and being ostracized by, the

very same institution that I protect and take up for is real and these men shared those stories with me.

The joys of this project were knowing that this research will aid and support various ministries and missions of the church. The struggles are indeed real; however, being able to minister and bridge a much-needed gap to bring men back to church ready and willing to work for the kingdom will strengthen the men's ministry and retool the thinking and actions of congregations. Missing from the congregation that I serve and many other churches are more than warm bodies to fill the pews. Absent from these churches are the gifts, strengths and resources that these men bring. Some of these contributions are financial for sure; however, talents of teaching, coaching, mentoring serving and many other gifts of the Spirit are absent because of the absence of these men.

It would be an honor to replicate this research at another appointment in the African Methodist Episcopal Church to win souls for the Lord and to bring men back into leadership positions in the church. I would expand the study to include other ethnicities and age groups for further research. I was fortunate and blessed to interview a broad base of African American males ages twenty-one to forty. I would also look at researching the African American female and their roles in a certain age group.

Aha Moments for this Project

I was moved in many ways by this six-week training sessions and especially the graduation week and observance. The men who participated in these sessions felt the love and care of the evangelism group as they joyfully came back into the fold of the church. Out of the eight men who participated, six came to faithfully join or rejoin the family of

faith at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. That was a 75% increase of African American males becoming a "working" part of the church. This project had accomplished its mission. To witness the results of a team committed to making positive differences in the lives of African American males between the ages of twenty-one to forty has been quite rewarding.

It has been observed by the researcher that when you are looking for great results and expect the best from individuals, evangelizing still works! After so little positive results that come from mundane efforts to evangelize and see people converted to the Christian faith for so long, some "aha moments" came about in that evangelism can and does work, and that Jesus did not give us a command to evangelize without supplying the power to do so.

Some of the challenges were to keep the men motivated to continue the journey. Everyone, including this researcher, has busy schedules and other commitments; but the core group that committed to this endeavor did not give up on the journey. Much prayer and constant contact were the keys to getting through the challenges.

This project can be replicated by other churches. It can be put in a book form or used in small groups by pastors and lay leaders to recruit, evangelize and instruct persons in New Disciple Training and Evangelism outreach ministries. This work can also be viewed as a model in developing other specific demographic groups such as intentionally developing strategies to evangelize youth, women, married couples or singles

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT LETTER

Participant's Consent Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Reverend D. Sinclair Forbes, II and I am conducting a research study in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree. My study is entitled: "A Model to Retain African American Males, Ages 21-40 at Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church" and I would like to invite you to participant in this study. I am requesting to give a brief presentation on the goals of the research and requesting volunteers to participate in this study. The initial meeting will be held on **Saturday, July 23, 2016 beginning at 11:00 AM.**

There will be plenty of food, fun, games, and fellowship at this meeting and I will review with you the goals of my research project. As a participant, you will not be paid but it is my belief that the information from the interviews and six weeks of training/study will be valuable toward the greater good of recruitment and retention of African American males ages 21-40 in our community churches.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at (404) 488-9339 or forbess@bellsouth.net.

I look forward to seeing you on Saturday, July 23, 2016!

Respectfully,

Pastor D. Sinclair Forbes

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

Participant's Consent Form

Hello _____,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my research study. Your honest feedback will be vital to the body of research dealing with the selected topic and the problem that I have chosen to research.

I will us an interview protocol and a six-week training/study for collecting the pertinent data for the study. In order to protect the integrity of the participants and the study, you will not be represented by name but by a code name. P1, P2, P3, P4 and so on. To be considered to participate in the study, you must have never been active in a church or have once been active in church and decided not to attend church because of some type of problem or problems. In your one-on-one interview with me, you will be asked five interview questions. The one-on-one interview will take approximately an hour. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, notes taken and stored in a safe and secured place.

The title of the Dissertation is:

A Model to Retain African American Males Ages 21-40 at Mount Zion African
Methodist Episcopal Church

If you are willing to participate, please sign the consent form below and provide your contact information.

My signature is an indication that I am volunteering to participate in Pastor D. Sinclair Forbes's research study as described above.

Name: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank You,

Pastor D. Sinclair Forbes (404) 488-9339 forbess@bellsouth.net

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTONS

1. What has turned you from mainstream church?
2. What are the lacking qualities that the church has not addressed?
3. What has fueled your decisions about church and how has this affected you as a man?
4. What would be the motivating factor or factors to give church another opportunity and forgive it for the hurt and void it has left?
5. What are the pros and cons of not attending church?

APPENDIX D
TRAINING SESSIONS SCHEDULE

TRAINING SESSIONS/STUDY

WEEKS	DATES	TRAINING SESSIONS/STUDY
Week 1	August 3, 2016	When Your Back Is Against the Walls
Week 2	August 10, 2016	The Power of Unity
Week 3	August 17, 2016	Mentorship
Week 4	August 24, 2016	Education and Careers
Week 5	August 31, 2016	All Lives Matter
Week 6	September 7, 2016	Culminating Activities

APPENDIX E

TRAINING STUDY SESSIONS OVERVIEW

Training/Study Sessions Overview

Every week of training and study sessions began with welcome, dinner and fellowship which each participant enjoyed and no one ever missed a week of attending the sessions. During week one, August 3, 2016, the title of the presentation was “When your Back is Against the Walls.” The presenters for week one were the Researcher, Associate Minister and the Context Associates. The Researcher talked about Chapter 2 of Daniel where Daniel’s “Back was against the wall” and when King Nebuchanezzar had a dream that greatly troubled him. The wise men from Babylon, Daniel and his Hebrew friends would be put to death because they could not interpret King Nebuchanezzar’s dream.

The researcher explained that when it comes to handling “Back to the Wall Experiences”, remember that no matter what tight place we may find ourselves in, God is going to supernaturally get us out of it. Regardless of the situation, trust God and He will go through the situation with you. There are times when God wants to deepen us rather than rescue us. In Daniel’s case, he and his friends found themselves in a threatening situation that was not of their own making. They really did not know if God was going to deliver them from it. One thing that they did know was that their God could be trusted.

There was a Round Table activity with the following questions to discuss: (1) Things we can do when our backs are against the wall. (2) How can we help others when their backs are against the wall? (3) What does God want from us as men when we need to help other brothers with their backs against the wall?

During Week two, August 10, 2016, of the training/study sessions, the presentation was on “The Power of Unity.” The Presenters were the Researcher,

Associate Minister, and Context Associates. The Researcher used an outline and bibles for this session. There was discussion on how we need unity in the church. In this day and age in a time, when there is so many divisions within and without, we need to be unified in the House of the Lord. We can always do more together than we can do apart. We discussed how we could achieve unity in the church of the Lord today.

Discussion was given on God's desire for His people to be unified and how Jesus prayed for unity, died for unity and how God's nature demands unity. We learned that true unity is oneness with the same mind, same goals and same heart. There were open discussions about the hindrances to unity and if it was possible to have union without having unity. Things that keep Christians from having true love for one another were:

- “My Way” or “The Highway” attitude
- Backbiting and gossiping (Romans 1:30; Proverbs 25:23; Proverbs 20:19)
- Complaining and murmuring (Philippians 2:14)
- Apathy, I just don’t care about anything
- Unfaithfulness, Revelation 2:10; Matthew 6:33)
- Old Squabbles (Philippians 4:2, Ruth)

There were also open and honest discussions on the power of unity and how there is strength, encouragement, and help in unity by having the mind of Christ, realizing that this is not all about ME, and determination to become united.

Week three, August 17, 2016, of the training/study session was entitled: “Spiritual Mentorship.” The presenters for this session were the researcher and the Context Associates. The opening Roundtable discussion during dinner was “What do you want in a mentor here at the church?” The background scripture for the evening was I Corinthians

4: 14-21. There are many church members who have been in the church twenty, thirty and even fifty years and have never been a spiritual father or mother in either sense. We are called to move beyond being a child and to being a spiritual leader and mentor.

Brainstorming on the traits of a mentor are:

- A mentor speaks the hard truth. So many people walk around making bad spiritual decisions, and amazingly, the other Christians around them all stand back and watch as mistakes are repeated again and again. We need someone who loves us enough to come to us with the hard truth and say to us: “That relationship is destructive for you” “Your anger is inappropriate,” “You seem to be pulling back from your church family.”
- 2. Our desire cannot be to add shame to their name, but rather to see their behavior changed and their relationship with God redeemed.
- A mentor gives his heart away. Paul, even when writing hard words, is quick to share his love for the Corinthians. If we are going to be spiritual mentors, we have to be willing to be the first to share our hearts with words of love, encouragement, and compassion. We must love enough to speak words of bold love to our brothers.
- A mentor forges the trail. Paul’s words leave many uncomfortable, but the truth is a simple one: we must be able to say to those we mentor, “Don’t just do as I say; do as I do.” I’m not just going to pray, I’m going to show you what a man of prayer looks like.” “I’m not going to just talk about forgiveness, I’m going to show you what forgiving an enemy looks like.” “I’m not just going to talk about

Jesus, I'm going to show you what Jesus looks like." We cannot expect anyone we mentor to go to levels of maturity that we have not experienced ourselves.

- A mentor opens doors. In verse 17, Paul tells of Timothy's imminent arrival in order to help them to grow. Some might presume that being in a mentoring relationship means holding tight to your control over the person, but that is not true. You want to introduce the person to other mature believers and other positive spiritual influences that can add more to what you've shared. A spiritual mentor is looking to expand his spiritual child's world of influence.
- A mentor shares biblical wisdom. There is no substitute for a solid grounding in the Word. Mentoring is about developing a relationship and friendship, but it is not only about that. There must be a passion for spiritual maturity that comes from the Word.
- A mentor is not afraid to kick you in the seat of your pants. When the situation warrants, a mentor is not afraid to get serious with the discipline. We are talking here about a serious spiritual error that requires a serious response. The one who loves the spiritual child must also be willing to discipline the spiritual child.

Week 4 of our training/study sessions was held on August 24, 2016, and it was about education and careers. The presenters for this evening was the researcher, Context Associates, Representatives from the Okaloosa School District and Northwest Florida College. The thought-provoking questions were: "Are you struggling with an educational and career decision?" "Are you wondering which direction the Lord desires you to go?"

As Christians, we desire to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. We want to do His will in all aspects of our lives: the daily choices we make that govern our

actions and the large life decisions we have to make. We long to make the “right” decisions: the choices that prove to be good for us and that the one we believe God would have us make. The bible teaches us some important principles that can assist you in becoming a wise decision maker.

- Our first priority in life must be to develop an increasingly intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Being rooted in Christ is a fundamental “prerequisite” to finding God’s will for your career. You will not be ready or able to find the career path He has designed for you unless you are seeking Him first. God has created you with the aptitude for particular skills and abilities and with the inclination toward particular interests. Each one of you men has been given work-related gifts that have been chosen specifically for you (Romans 12: 6-8). God desires for you to use the gifts He has given you that includes making good career decisions you must have a thorough knowledge of your personality, skills, abilities, interests and values.
- Being a Christian does not exempt us from the responsibility to become wise decision makers. Therefore, it is your responsibility to use your God-given mind to learn how to make good career decisions. Learning how to make decisions is a part of developing wisdom and maturity, both of which God desires for us. The book of Proverbs is full of admonitions about the importance of gaining wisdom to live a life that is pleasing to God. The proverbs are given to us “for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life (Proverbs 1: 1-3). God desires for us to have not only

spiritual maturity and wisdom but also wisdom that relates to making decisions in this life.

- Living out God's will for your career and life will require that you take risks. God does not call us to risk-free living because we would not need to develop our "faith muscles." God works to impress upon our hearts and minds a need, a cause or an interest that we develop a desire to do something about, then to lead us one step at a time. Learning to take risks is an essential part of following God and living out His will for our lives. Without risks, a person's life becomes a process of digging an ever deeper rut in which you stagnate and cut yourself off from all that God intends life to be (Hebrews 11:1; Ephesians 3: 20-21).

The representatives from Okaloosa School District and Northwest Florida College were available to talk with the men about ABE/GED programs and about technical and college careers.

Week five, August 31, 2016, was the week for the researcher, context associates and Law Enforcement Officers to present "All Lives Matter." There are three things that are essential to the brain and one's ability to perform at work, at home, and in life; and they are safety, belonging and mattering. Everyone wants to matter and everyone should matter. All lives matter to God. When we kneel to pray to Him, God does not look at the color of the skin before listening and responding to us. The Lord looks at our hearts (I Samuel 16:7). To God, all lives matter.

- We are all made in the image of God. God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female human beings and that means all (Genesis 1:27).

- We all have the same opportunity with God. “And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Notice that opportunity to please God extends to anyone.
- Christ died for all of us. “He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Take notice of the word everyone. So how should we follow His example and make everyone feel they matter? By practicing the Golden Rule which calls us to treat others as you want to be treated.

My life matters; your life matters; ALL lives Matter!

Seek God first and His righteousness, and then go out and treat others in a way that is pleasing to God because all lives matter!

Week six was the culminating activities for our training/study session. It was held September 7, 2016, and this evening included all people who came out to speak, assist, and volunteer which included the eight males who participated and their families. They were given certificates for attendance and participation. They each got a chance to speak when given their certificate and eight out of eight said they were willing and ready to go to work in the church and start a new life living for God. We offered the “invitation to Christian discipleship” and all eight African American males came forward to join and/or rejoin Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. There was not a dry eye in the fellowship hall. We serve an awesome God!

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